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THE
RED
CAMELLIA.

Vol. I.

SENSATIONAL NOVELS

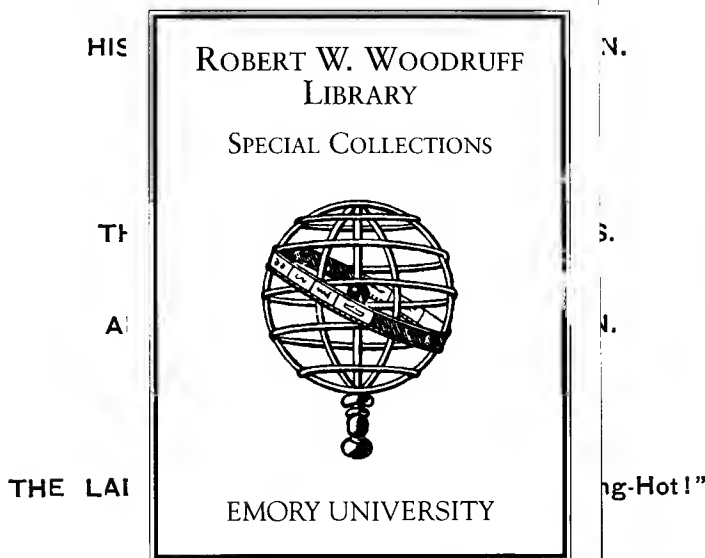
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BY FORTUNE DU BOISGOBEY.

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THE RED CAMELLIA.

PART I.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ODÉON.

I.

HOW CHEVALIER CASSE-COU PROVED WORTHY OF HIS NAME.

THE Carnival was almost at an end, and the fog of a dull February night spread a veil of moisture over Paris. The heavy frontage of the Odéon Theatre rose up in the dim light of the street lamps, and the slate roof of the classic edifice was faintly defined against the dark sky.

A long file of students were waiting under the portico for the theatre to open. Huge posters announced the first performance of a play of the romantic school, and, judging from the variety of sounds which awoke the echoes of the quiet Palace of the Luxembourg, the crowd was impatient. Nothing was wanting in the unusual bustle, not even the rumble of vehicles continually driving up to the entrance laden with eager spectators. It must be confessed, however, that there were more cabs than private carriages, for the Revolution of July 1830 had taken place not many months before, and luxury had not yet begun to prevail again in Paris. Still some handsome equipages from time to time appeared, wheeling round and then dashing up to the door, the steps being let down by attentive footmen so as to enable ladies with plumes in their hair, and gentlemen in large cloaks to alight.

Under the colonnade in front of the old pile stood a man who seemed to take a deal of pleasure in looking at the gay sight. Tall, thin and long-legged, this individual was young in appearance and supple in his bearing. There was something military about his attire, and something of the eccentric style affected by the dandies of the time. Buttoned up in a long coat fitting him tightly at the waist and falling to his heels, with a singular hat with a raised brim perched on his head, he stood there leaning carelessly on a stick with a twisted handle.

As for his face, it strikingly resembled the well-known countenance of Cervantes's immoral hero, Don Quixote. His long, curved nose, his hollow cheeks and his chin adorned with the pointed beard which the partisans of the romantic school were then introducing, gave him a somewhat melancholy and odd appearance. However his large brown eyes of remarkable

lustre and sweetness softened the effect of his angular features. At a glance it was obvious that he was brave, generous, and romantic, just like the illustrious hidalgo of La Mancha.

As this belated representative of whilom chivalry stood outside the theatre, he was suddenly disturbed in his reverie by a somewhat abrupt shock. He turned quickly round with the evident intention of calling the awkward individual who had jostled him to account, and found himself face to face with a tall, broad-shouldered man. However, his anger suddenly departed as he caught sight of the woman whom this colossal being was escorting. Never has a more exquisite and charming little creature accompanied a bulkier and more repulsive escort. Daintily attired in a long white pelisse, she leaned upon the tall man's arm, and gave a hand to a little girl who appeared to be between eight and ten years of age. The ill-matched pair passed on, and had already disappeared through the doorway of the theatre, before the man whom they had jostled had recovered from his surprise and admiration.

"A princess persecuted by a giant!" muttered this strange personage. "Come, Francis," added he, talking to himself, "she must be protected!" Then with a single stride he passed through the lobby, and pushing back a swinging door, went up to the ticket-office. "Francis Cambremer," said he to one of the persons on duty there.

This name, which he had somewhat timidly given, sufficed to open the way for him, and an old employé almost bowed as he murmured: "Go in, chevalier; go in!"

The person thus addressed as chevalier did not wait to be told twice, but there had been a moment's delay, and when he passed the office he could only perceive the end of the little woman's white pelisse at the top of the wide staircase leading to the first tier. He went up the stairs at a run, and completed the ascent, just in time to see the door of one of the boxes close upon the person whom he was following. However, he wisely determined to reach the gallery, and as it was still almost empty, he was able to take a seat there at his ease. He installed himself in the front row, just facing the box which the party he had noticed had entered, and he waited quietly for the grating which concealed them from him to be lowered.

The house was filling rapidly, and in less than fifteen minutes a motley crowd had assembled there. In the pit, the velvet coats of long-haired artists, and the red caps of students prevailed. In the gallery were several respectable members of the middle classes over whom the youngsters with pointed beards and peaked hats kept zealous watch, having made up their minds to treat them like that rascal, Racine, if they undertook to hiss the play. The piece which was about to be performed was entitled "The Monk," and it had been adapted from the gloomy novel of the same name—the work of Lewis, that English author who used to make our grand-mothers fairly shudder from head to foot. Although Fontan, who had adapted the piece, was not exactly one of the writers of the new school but preferred the old style of classical melodrama, he enjoyed all the sympathy of "Young France," on account of the manner in which he had been persecuted for his political opinions by the fallen government of King Charles X.

The motley appearance of the audience did not seem to interest the gentleman called chevalier, for he confined his attention to the box in which the pair whom he had followed into the theatre, were seated. However the grating of this box was not as yet lowered; all that he could see through

its network was the occasional sparkle of the lady's eyes, and the shadow of her escort's bulky frame.

Meantime, a confused murmur arose from the pit, like that of the tide coming in. The curtain was long in rising, and the impatient members of the audience began to stamp their feet in time, and sing a variety of patriotic airs. When the repertory was exhausted from the "Marseillaise" to the "Varsoivienne," the noisy pitites experienced a desire for other exercises, and began to apostrophize the stylish public on the first tier. The obstinately closed box then soon became the object of the students' attention, and cries of, "Down with the grating!" assumed a threatening unanimity.

The man whom the check-takers had called chevalier felt greatly annoyed as he heard this clamour, and he looked fiercely around him. However, when a cry of satisfaction suddenly rose from the audience, he turned and then saw that the box-grating had at last been lowered. As he looked he felt dazzled. The unknown lady, as she carelessly sat there, near the edge of the box, seemed to him some celestial vision. She was so lovely that the noisy, jeering crowd became quiet at once, ceasing to bawl in its anxiety to admire.

The enthusiastic spectator in the gallery remained as if petrified as he gazed at the woman's face, so youthful and beautiful. Never had he beheld such brilliant eyes, such a creamy complexion, or lips of so vivid a purple. Her jet-black hair and the opaque whiteness of her skin seemed to indicate a southern origin, but the general character of her face had a sweetness and softness which is often lacking in women born in tropical climates.

As for the giant who accompanied her, he was scarcely visible, for he remained at the back of the box as stiff, as silent and as motionless as a jailer on the watch. The admirer of his charming companion gazed in vain; he could only distinguish one characteristic of the man's gloomy face—a double row of very white teeth which gleamed at times under a thick, black moustache.

"The mouth of an ogre!" muttered the chevalier, whose imagination was extremely lively.

However, by the side of the young woman sat the little girl, who was also wonderfully lovely. The resemblance between them was striking; but the child was darker, and had a more serious face. Her large eyes looked with astonishment, and yet calmly at the throng. She seemed like an angel who had alighted upon earth for the first time. She soon engrossed all Francis Cambremer's attention, and it would seem that he was extremely fond of children, for his eyes were lowered, and he stealthily wiped away a tear that had fallen upon his tanned cheek.

However he was aroused from his reverie by the noise of the orchestra, which was beginning to play the overture with a loud blare of trombones, and as he was obliged to sit down, he necessarily lost sight of the box. The curtain rose upon a scene representing a garden of the Franciscan convent at Madrid, and the play began by the soliloquy of a subaltern demon disguised as a monk, who informed the audience that he had been sent to earth to ruin the soul of Don Ambrosio, the father superior. In the second scene the noise of a gong announced the appearance of the Prince of Darkness, and the most fantastic incidents occurred one after another, until at last Satan crossed swords with a certain Don Lopez and ran him through with a thrust evidently learnt in the fencing-schools of the lower regions.

The curtain fell upon the ridiculous situation, and the chevalier, who had been condemned to immobility while the act was progressing, at once glanced at the box where the giant's teeth still glittered in the shade. The child seemed lost in thought, and the woman was looking through an opera-glass at the stage-box on the right, where there stood a young man in black.

Unfortunately her act gave offence to the crowd. It is difficult to explain why looking at people through opera-glasses has always made the mob angry, but the feeling exists and at that time it was very strong.

"Down with that glass!" howled some easily excited students.

The chevalier started as though the order had been addressed to himself, and looked contemptuously at the brawlers. Then seeing that his mute challenge took no effect, he rose and seating himself upon the edge of the gallery began to stealthily admire the lady once more. However, the reckless fellow had unwittingly broken one of the singular laws made by the public of the day.

"Turn your face to the pit!"

This cry from five hundred voices burst forth like a thunder-clap. The champion of the lower gallery contented himself with shrugging his shoulders and continuing gazing as before. But almost immediately, a projectile borrowed from the vegetable kingdom whistled past his ear and fell into the box. The young woman recoiled with a terrible start, and her admirer turned round angrily. "Who is the coward who threw that?" he demanded in a loud, clear voice.

"It was I. Don't you like it?" called out an individual with a peaked hat.

With a movement as rapid as thought the chevalier climbed upon the seat, measured the distance at a glance, and leaped into the pit calling out these words, which the whole audience could hear: "My name's Casse-Cou—Break-Neck—and I'm going to chastise you for your impertinence!"

An indescribable tumult now arose. Women gave vent to terrified shrieks, and men rose so as to see what would result from the reckless conduct of the chevalier. The box in which the unknown lady sat, was the only one where nobody observed what was going on, for the grating was pulled up abruptly by the man with the heavy beard, who until now had kept in the background. As for the persons in the pit who were endangered by the chevalier's unexpected leap into their midst, they moved aside with a rapidity which gave fresh proof of the fact that crowds may easily be compressed. However the offender paid the full penalty for what he had done. Casse-Cou had measured his distance so well that he came down upon the fellow's shoulders, and they both rolled together under the seats and for a few moments remained a confused heap, raining blows.

The aggressor who had flown from above had the advantage and would perhaps have strangled his adversary, if the strong arm of the law had not intervened in the shape of a gendarme belonging to the squad on duty in the theatre. This representative of the authorities made his way through the crowd, parted the combatants with great difficulty, and took upon himself to arrest them both. However, the man with the peaked hat had been so severely handled that it was necessary to let him seat himself and draw breath, while his conqueror was taken out of the auditorium. Casse-Cou made no resistance whatever, but drew from his pocket a number of visiting cards which he threw about, calling as he did so: "I am at home every morning."

Courage impresses the masses, and nobody took up the chevalier's challenge, though more than one person loudly demanded his release.

"Let him go! he's a brave fellow!"

"After all, he did no harm."

"Besides, it was the other who began."

These well-meant remarks did not, however, soften the gendarme who dragged his captive into the lobby. It was filled with curious lookers-on, and the delinquent probably did not wish to excite any fresh remark, for he walked very briskly and with a good grace towards the office of the commissary on duty. Commissaires, or officers of peace, it may be mentioned, attend the various Paris theatres regularly every evening.

When Casse-Cou entered the official sanctuary he found himself face to face with a functionary of pleasant appearance, who when he heard what had happened could not help smiling at the queer courage that the chevalier had displayed. "Young man," began he, in a fatherly tone.

"I'm not a young man," interrupted the chevalier. "I was thirty on the day before yesterday."

"You are all the more to be censured, then," replied the official, frowning.

"To be censured? What stuff! I punished an impudent fellow, and I am quite ready to do it over again."

At these daring words the commissary started up and said in a severe tone: "I advise you to answer me quietly, if you don't wish to make matters worse for yourself. What is your name?"

"Francis Cambremer."

"Where do you live?"

"In the Rue Férou, No. 22."

"What is your profession?"

"I have none."

"Do you mean to say that you live on your income?"

"I have not any income."

"Are you a landowner then?"

"No, I have neither houses nor land."

"What do you live on, then?"

"That is my business."

The official again started. "Excuse me," said he, "it is my business as well as yours, and the proof of it is that I shall send you to prison to remain there until you prove to me what your resources are."

The prisoner had so far been merely irreverential, but at this threat he burst out into loud protests. "Send me to prison! I defy you to do it!" and then he began to bounce about like an india-rubber ball.

"Gendarme, take this man to the station-house!" ordered the commissary.

"But this isn't the way to treat a respectable man!" shouted Casse-Cou in exasperation.

"You must prove then, that you *are* a respectable man."

"How the deuce do you wish me to prove that?"

"By telling me the name of some reliable person who will answer for you."

"I do not want anyone to answer for me."

"Then you mustn't object if I do my duty."

As the commissary rose to put an end to the hearing, the door was set aside, and a timid voice exclaimed: "Excuse me, sir, it is I, Courapiéd."

This singular name—Run-a-foot—was no doubt known to the magistrate, for his face assumed an expression of good-natured curiosity. "Come in, my good fellow, and tell me at once what you wish," said he.

The individual who complied with this injunction was a stout pleasant-looking man in the dress of a well-to-do tradesman. He held a fur cap which he was twisting about and he smiled pleasantly. "My respects, chevalier!" said he, turning to Cambremer, who looked at him with surprise and then exclaimed: "What? is it you, Cassonade?" (Brown-sugar.)

"Do you know this man?" asked the commissary of the new-comer.

"Certainly; he is a neighbour of mine, sir."

"A neighbour of yours?"

"Yes, sir, ever since I set up as a grocer in the Rue Férou he has been living just over my shop. When I saw him arrested just now, I thought that he might be in a difficulty, and—"

"You came to get him out of it?"

"If you are willing, sir. It was a good idea of mine come go to the theatre to-night, and I am quite ready to be answerable for him, for he is the best man in the whole neighbourhood."

"But not the most peaceable," said the commissary, who was already softened.

"Oh, as for that, he is rather high-tempered, but as good as gold, and charitable and generous—ah! if you only knew all he's done. He was given the nickname of Chevalier Casse-Cou because he once jumped out of a window to save a woman in a fire."

"Well, sir," said the commissary, turning to Casse-Cou, after a moment's pause, "I have the greatest confidence in this honest fellow, who was formerly in my employ; and as he answers for you, I am willing to let you go. But you must admit that you have a strange way of answering questions."

The chevalier blushed, and it was easy to see that, although so reckless, he could easily be managed if mild measures were resorted to.

"You promise me to behave yourself, eh?" said the commissary, controlling a slight desire to laugh.

"You will allow me to go back into the auditorium, won't you?" asked Casse-Cou.

"On conditions that you don't return to the gallery."

"I promise you that," replied the chevalier in a tone which showed his satisfaction.

"Well, then, young man, go and don't sin any more!"

Casse-Cou did not need to be told twice, but darted out of the office, while the indulgent commissary was saying: "What an eccentric fellow!"

Cambremer met his adversary as he entered the lobby. He was being taken away in his turn, but he did not even glance at him, and was about to run up the stairs, when he felt that some one was pulling him by the coat-tail. "Not into the gallery, chevalier, that is too risky; and, besides, you promised, you know," said the grocer who answered to the name of Cassonade.

"Deuce take it, so I did!" rejoined Casse-Cou, quite taken aback.

And thereupon, instead of going up to the first tier, he followed the dark passage leading to the stalls. The swinging door was open, and the chevalier found that the second act was about to end. He also saw with astonishment that the grating of the box in which he had been so much interested was still up.

"The ogre has taken her away," muttered he.

By looking more closely, however, he thought he could discern a form moving behind the network, and almost at the same moment he was struck by the attitude of a young man in a stage-box in front of him. It was the same young fellow whom the unknown woman had been looking at through her glass just before *Casse-Cou* had taken his perilous leap.

This solitary occupant of the best place in the theatre was standing up, leaning against a pillar which partly hid him, and looking attentively at the box with the iron grating. It was difficult to distinguish his features, but it was apparent that he was pale, slim, young, and short of stature. Strangely enough, at that season, and at that period, when *camellias* were still very rare in France, he held in his hand a red flower of that kind, and raised it from time to time, with the evident intention of attracting some one's notice.

Casse-Cou instinctively realised that this was a signal. However, all at once the young man suddenly drew back. Had his pantomime been answered from the grated box? The chevalier could not tell; but he was not a man to remain long in uncertainty, and, despite all his promises, he darted up the stairs.

On the third step he nearly ran against a person who was coming down; and as he raised his head he found himself confronting the man who had acted as the escort of the unknown lady. This disagreeable individual held by the hand the little girl who had been with him in the box and he was hastening towards the exit so fast that the chevalier caught but a glimpse of him. However this encounter set his imagination at work once more. Why had the ogre left the lady alone? Where was he going with the child? Perhaps only to buy her some sugar-plums; however, this commonplace explanation did not enter *Casse-Cou's* mind. Almost without knowing what he was doing he continued to climb the stairs, and walked straight towards the box, the number of which he had previously noted. However, when he found himself near the door which separated him from the mystery which his imagination had conjured up, he began to reflect. To call the box-opener would have been as irrational as to knock at the door. What could he say to a woman whom he did not know? Still he was insanely anxious to see her again. So he adopted a halfway course, and going quietly up to the oval peep-hole in the door which was on a level with his eyes, he looked into the box.

The semi-obscurity which prevailed within at first prevented him from seeing anything; but after looking in for a few seconds he drew back with a cry of terror.

"What is the matter? Have you gone mad?" inquired an old box-opener who was squatting upon her stool like an ancient sibyl on her tripod.

The question was by no means strange in presence of the extraordinary behaviour of the chevalier, who, with a pale face, dilated eyes, his hair on end, and his hat pushed back, furiously pounded upon the door of the box with both fists, exclaiming: "She is there! I can see her—quick! quick!"

"Do you know that if you keep on like this I shall call the police?" said the box-opener, reluctantly rising from her stool.

But the chevalier came down upon her like a whirlwind, seized her hand in which she held the keys of the boxes, and dragged her towards the door.

"Open it!" said he, hoarsely.

The old woman, in terror, and convinced that she had a dangerous maniac to deal with, mechanically obeyed, and unlocked the door. The rays of the lamp in the lobby then penetrated into the box and lighted up a sorry sight. The unknown lady lay upon the floor motionless—her immobility being either that of sleep or death.

Then it was the turn of the old woman to raise an alarm, and this attracted the attention of the other box-openers on the first tier. However, Casse-Cou had rushed into the box and he had already raised the young woman in his strong arms.

"Make way!" cried he, as he carried her along as though she had been a sleeping child. "A doctor! bring a doctor!" he added, placing his burden upon one of the benches in the lobby.

He was then able to examine the woman's face. Her features had not changed, but her eyes were set and lifeless, and her parted lips showed that her teeth were clinched, perhaps in a final convulsion. Her attire was not disordered, and the white gloves which covered her arms almost to the elbows were unsoiled. One of the long tresses of her black hair had become unfastened, probably in her fall. The distracted chevalier touched her discoloured lips and found that they were as cold as ice. Then he knelt down beside the body as it lay upon the bench, and rubbed the young woman's hands, while a number of box-openers ran about uttering lamentations and groans, and indulging in superfluous remarks.

There is always a crowd where any unlooked-for misfortune has taken place, and the lobby was soon full of persons drawn there more by curiosity than by the desire to make themselves useful. So the doctor, whom a box-opener with more sense than the rest of the party had gone to fetch, had some difficulty in making his way up to the body. He was a bald-headed old man, with a white tie and the grave stiffness of manner supposed to be inseparable from the medical practitioners of Molière's time. He at once pushed Casse-Cou gently aside and then began to feel the woman's pulse. This auscultation lasted for a moment, during which the chevalier stamped impatiently up and down.

"There is nothing to be done, nothing whatever," said the Esculapius, drawing out his words; "this woman is—dead."

"Dead!" repeated Casse-Cou. "That's impossible!"

"Young man," resumed the doctor, in a harsh tone, "let me tell you that I never make mistakes, and that my diagnosis—"

"Then she must have been murdered!"

"Allow me, allow me, I don't say that, and there is no symptom of—"

"By him! by that giant!" resumed the chevalier, wildly.

The persons present, who naturally took him for a relative of the victim, began to feel sorry for him, but he suddenly dashed headforemost into the compact throng, which he parted as a wedge splits a block of wood, and began darting along the lobby, shouting: "I will find him! I must get hold of him!"

The stupefied public then imagined that he had lost his head, and no one thought of stopping him. Urged on by his fixed idea of finding the so-called ogre again, he rushed aimlessly down the stairs, and in a few moments he had looked everywhere about the lobby and the entrance without seeing the man he sought.

If the raging chevalier had retained any degree of coolness he would have concluded that this man, if really he were the woman's murderer, must already be far from the theatre. But coolness was not Casse-Cou's

strong point, and he reached the vestibule of the Odéon without having become in the least degree calmer.

The act had just ended, and the public were coming out for the second "wait." Casse-Cou jostled everybody and rushed into the street, while the old check-taker who had previously admitted him muttered: "Hallo! There goes the chevalier as crazy as ever!"

When Francis reached the colonnade he saw no signs of the giant, but to his surprise he came against the young man whom he had seen holding the red camellia in the stage box. This young fellow was going hurriedly down the entrance steps. It was he undoubtedly, for by the light of the street-lamp Casse-Cou caught sight of his pale face and of the red flower which he still held in his hand. The chevalier then had a sudden inspiration.

"I shall find out everything through that fellow, and he shall pay for both, if I don't find the other one," he muttered.

But, short as had been the hesitation which had followed upon his first surprise, it had given the young man time to step forward and get into a coach which stood, apparently waiting for him, at the entrance. The door closed at the moment when the chevalier stepped out upon the slippery side-pavement.

"A fine cabriolet, sir; all ready, sir!" at this moment said a driver who stood near by, and who thought that the chevalier looked like a good customer.

Casse-Cou did not hesitate for an instant. The cabriolet in question stood close to the exit, and the chevalier sprang into it without even resting his foot upon the steps. "Twenty francs if you can catch up the vehicle which is going down the Rue de Condé!" said he.

"All right, sir!" replied the driver, jumping up beside him with an alacrity which promised well; "you are in luck, for my mare has not had anything to do all day." As he spoke he gathered up the reins, and gave the animal a triumphant cut with his whip.

"It is that lumbering old coach over there, is it not, that you want me to catch?" he resumed. "There are two horses to it, but we are the lighter, and you shall see how we'll manage it."

Casse-Cou had no desire to reply to this chatter. Leaning over the apron of the cabriolet, with his neck stretched forward, he kept his eyes fixed upon the coach which was going ahead with such velocity that he felt afraid that he would lose sight of it, in spite of the driver's bragging. But, in point of fact, the animal harnessed to the cabriolet was a capital one, a dappled Normandy mare, answering to the name of La Grise, and she tore along so fast that the hood of the vehicle rocked backwards and forwards in a most exasperating way.

Only those who are over forty can remember the strange vehicles then in use. The one which Casse-Cou had hired was a fair specimen of the kind. The body of the cabriolet, painted a light yellow and set up high on enormous wheels, was ornamented upon the back and sides with a colossal number, which could be read at a distance of thirty paces. This was a disadvantage which did not exist in the case of the coach which the chevalier was following. Its dark colour and black harness were not sufficiently discernible in the fog for any prudent person to let it get far ahead.

When it reached the end of the Rue de Condé it turned abruptly to the left, and a moment afterwards went down the Rue de Seine. The yellow

cabriolet kept its distance, however, thanks to the "gec-ups" which the driver constantly repeated to stimulate his mare's courage.

"It seems that we are going over the water," said he, philosophically, as he saw the direction which the coach was taking. "Never mind! there is nothing surprising in that; some woman in it! I know all about these things! They always drop down somewhere near the Palais Royal or the boulevards."

"Get on! make haste!" growled the chevalier, who was not at all disposed to enjoy his companion's commentaries upon life in Paris.

The coach reached the quay after turning near the Institute, and then went briskly along the Quai Voltaire.

"What does this mean? Can I be mistaken?" said the incorrigible driver. "But, after all, there are sometimes adventures in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Hum! never mind!"

The Carrousel Bridge was not at that time in existence, and the coach boldly contradicted the driver's last conjecture by crossing the river over the Royal Bridge. Until then nothing had happened to interrupt the chevalier's chase, and he still cherished the hope that he would soon collar the young man with the red camellia. La Grise seemed to be so well started that he thought for a moment of urging her on still more, in order to catch up with the coach and board it as if it had been a frigate attacked by a brig. But he had the good sense to say to himself that a struggle in the open street would not help him in what he had undertaken, and that it would be much better to allow the fugitive to stop at the door of some house, and enter it at his heels.

In 1831 the Place du Carrousel was not at all like what it is to-day; and upon the land where the new buildings of the Louvre now stand, there was a network of narrow streets through which it was by no means easy to direct one's self. The coach did not enter them, however, but took the Rue de Rohan which then served as a kind of entrance to the Rue de Richelieu. In this unlucky passage the yellow cabriolet ran upon a rock, that is to say it was stopped by a hand-cart which was just emerging from a carriage-way. La Grise lost some seconds in getting rid of this obstacle, and when she had done so, the coach ahead had gained at least a hundred paces advance. The chevalier could scarcely see its dark body in the fog.

"Twenty francs more if you will catch it! Kill your mare if you must!" he called out, wild with impatience.

"No need of that, sir; they have turned into the Rue de Richelieu and we are reaching the straight streets again. Besides, I don't think that they are going much further now."

The cabriolet was tearing along, and close to the Royal Library it had already caught up the lost distance. They went on at this furious rate for two or three minutes more, and then Casse-Cou with the utmost satisfaction, saw that the coach was gradually slackening its pace and approaching the right hand sidewalk. They had reached the corner of the boulevard.

"Phew! what a fuss for the sake of catching a woman from Frascati's," growled the driver. "It wasn't worth while to tire La Grise like that."

"Go on! go on till you touch the trap we are after," said Casse-Cou, while the coach was stopping before a wide entrance bright with lamps.

He then hastily alighted and waited with his heart boiling with anger and impatience. He had run the fugitive to earth and would now be able

to wrest from him the secret of the tragedy at the theatre, for he had no doubt but what the young man with the red camellia was somehow mysteriously involved in it.

The door of the coach opened, the steps were let down, and the chevalier saw—a woman alight.

To describe Casse-Cou's amazement would be impossible. He stood like a statue in the middle of the street, while the woman went lightly in at the doorway. He had scarcely time to see that she was tall and thin, and that her attire indicated a person of means. As for her face, he had not even a glimpse of it. Besides, what did it matter since the young man from the stage-box had escaped him?

"I must have mistaken the coach after that unlucky encounter in the Rue de Rohan," he muttered.

He still, however, believed that it was the same chestnuts that he saw before him, and the same dark-green vehicle. He stepped towards it to examine it more closely, but the tall, lanky, black-liveried coachman who held the reins had already whipped up the horses, and, now, at a fast trot he turned on to the Boulevard and vanished. Casse-Cou looked mournfully after the vehicle as it disappeared; but suddenly a voice from the cabriolet startled him in the midst of his reflections.

"Well, sir!" called out the owner of the grey mare, "we caught the princess?"

"You fool!" muttered the chevalier between his teeth.

"Only my mare had quite enough of it, and I think I've fairly earned my two gold shiners."

This discreet allusion to his magnificent promises reminded the disconcerted chevalier that he must pay his driver. He put his hand into his waistcoat pocket and took out a gold coin and some small change. This was not enough to pay all; and Casse-Cou again searched his pockets, but in vain; he could find nothing more. Greatly embarrassed at this fresh disappointment, he thought for a moment of confessing the plight he was in, and many a man in his place would have tried to get out of the difficulty with the one gold louis he had, but the chevalier always kept his word even with cab-drivers.

"I engage you by the hour," said he at once, "and you will lose nothing by waiting."

"As you please, sir," said the cabman; "if La Grise can have time to get her breath again, I'll take you wherever you like."

"Very well; where shall I find you?"

"On the right, on the Boulevard in front of the terrace. When you come out, call for Morillon."

With a cluck of the tongue, the Jehu then made the mare start off again, and turned on to the Boulevard, keeping close to the sidewalk. "I wish you good luck, sir," said the engaging driver, as he vanished round the corner.

This remark reminded the chevalier that he found himself outside a gambling-house. It was certainly not a desire to try his luck that urged him to enter; in fact, his first idea had been to return to the Odéon, but a kind of inspiration, as it were, tempted him to follow up the adventure.

"What if it should be one and the same person after all," he said to himself, as he thought of the woman who had alighted from the coach which the young man with the red camellia had entered. He reflected, moreover,

upon the futility of returning to the theatre to clear up the mystery which hung about the death of the unfortunate young woman. Her murderer, if, indeed, there had been a murder, would take good care not to return to the play-house, and it would be better to profit by the small chance that offered of finding his accomplice in Frascati's rooms. So the chevalier crossed the courtyard, and went up the wide stairs leading to the first floor.

The luxurious establishment which then was known throughout Europe, filled all the space between the Rue de Richelieu and the Rue Vivienne. A long terrace extended along the front on the Boulevard side, and splendid galleries opened one after another upon a large garden. The temple dedicated to the demon of play was really magnificent; and at night time when the chandeliers were lit, when the ring of gold resounded upon the green tables, an intoxicating and powerful odour emanated from this hell. Very few of those who crossed the formidable threshold emerged from it without yielding to the varied fascinations of the den, where fortunes melted away like wax at furnace heat. Young, beautiful, and superbly-attired women undertook to beguile to their ruin those whom the allurements of winning money might not perhaps have tempted. In the commonplace gambling-houses in the Palais Royal, play went on openly, with cold greed and hideous realism; but at Frascati's it had a luxurious veil thrown over it, and was decked with flowers, and made gay with music.

Casse-Cou, who was but little impressed by all the splendour, went in after the usual formality, which consisted in giving one's hat in exchange for a card with a number upon it, and he began to walk slowly through the rooms.

There were a great many players that night, and the tables were surrounded by silent and compact circles. Great passions are mute, and there was nothing to be heard but the monotonous voices of the croupiers calling the game. The chevalier looked attentively at all the women; and more than one mistook his motives. But the inviting glances which he received had no effect whatever; for he was in search of something far removed from an ordinary adventure. The pretty faces which he found upon his way did not excite any other feeling than transient curiosity in his mind. He was pursuing a mere resemblance. It was, in truth, a mad undertaking to attempt to recognise, in feminine attire, the ever-fitting individual of whose features he had caught but a glimpse in the stage-box at the Odéon. Thus, he finished his rounds without encountering even a distant likeness between any one of the painted faces which passed under his eyes, and the pallid countenance of the young man with the red camellia.

After half an hour's walking about, he felt an indescribable loathing for all the fictitious enjoyment and tawdry allurements which were displayed. Besides, he had a severe headache, and longed for fresh air. So he went towards the exit, intending to walk up and down the street, for the emotions of the night had given him a lively desire for exercise, and he did not care to drive back to his rooms in the Rue Férou. However, he suddenly remembered that he had not enough money to pay the driver who was waiting for him, and it occurred to him that he might double his louis by risking it at the gambling-table.

Casse-Cou, among other faults, had that of always obeying his first impulse; and without reflecting any further, he went up to a table where "trente-et-quarante" was being played. He succeeded, though not with-

out some difficulty, in squeezing in between two players, and throwing down his louis haphazard.

The game was going on briskly, and in front of him, a beardless, fair-haired youth had just laid down a handful of bank-notes. The chevalier had already made the sacrifice of his louis, and he looked more at the face of the young man opposite to him than at the cards spread out on the table. The youth's face was ablaze with ardent passion; his eyes, which were blue, and veiled with lashes as long as a girl's, were full of sombre fire; a feverish desire to win contracted his lips, which had been intended for smiles.

"Poor boy!" thought Casse-Cou, "perhaps he has a mother still living, and yet he gambles!"

"Nine! red loses and colour wins!" sang out the croupier in a nasal voice.

The rake came down upon the young man's bank-notes, and he turned frightfully pale, while a louis fell upon the chevalier's stake; without knowing it he had played upon the black and won.

This was the time or never to take up his money and pay the driver, but Casse-Cou always interested himself in his neighbours' sorrows, and had now completely forgotten his stake in his interest in the player who had just lost. The young man's hand trembled as he brought forward another pile of bank-notes, and his contracted features betrayed his anguish. He lost again, while the chevalier's stake was again doubled.

The game went on with frightful rapidity; nothing was heard but the faint sound of the terrible rake, and the clink of the golden rain that fell upon the winners. This went on for eight or ten minutes, during which Casse-Cou's eyes were riveted upon his neighbour. After each play there was a slight murmur; it was as though those who were lucky sang the praises of the blind goddess, Fortune. The chevalier, who did not understand it all, thought that the people near by were pitying the young man. The ivory rake had for the ninth time swept away the youth's stake, and he now flung a single note upon the table, and waited.

"Red loses and colour wins!"

These words sounded like a death-warrant, and the note was swept up with the rest. The young man smiled, passed his fingers through his hair, and then rose up.

"It seems that that last note was his final cartridge," muttered a player who had seen many a man ruined.

Casse-Cou would have been glad to come to the rescue of the unfortunate boy whom fate had despoiled, and he looked at him anxiously.

"Who does that pile of money belong to, gentlemen?" now asked the croupier, striking a pile of notes and gold with his rake. It had accumulated on the side of black while red had lost ten times running.

There was a short pause, and Satan only knew the temptations that assailed more than one player. "That's yours, sir," finally said a charitable soul, nudging the chevalier's elbow.

"Mine!" repeated Casse-Cou in amazement.

"There are one thousand and twenty-four louis; and you know, sir, that the maximum is twelve thousand francs," resumed the croupier. "Make your game, gentlemen!"

"Take my advice," whispered a little old man to Casse-Cou, "gather up your winnings, and stake a hundred louis on the other side."

This remark was, however, lost upon the chevalier, who did not stir.

"Decide what you stake, sir," now said the man with the rake.

The youth had just buttoned up his coat with trembling fingers, and left the table.

"I'll bet that he's going to buy a pistol at the shop round the corner," said a gambler, who had noticed him.

"No, he'll try the Seine; if he had a hundred francs left him to buy a pistol he would rather stake again," rejoined another player.

This brutal dialogue made the chevalier shudder,

"He means to kill himself, at all events!" said the first speaker, with the utmost coolness.

"I'll prevent that, upon my word I will!" muttered Casse-Cou. And then gathering up his winnings with tiger-like eagerness, gold and bank-notes as well, he stuffed the entire amount into his pockets and uncereemoniously turned his back upon the players and the croupiers.

"Kill himself! at twenty!" he muttered, as he followed the youth, who was going slowly towards the exit. "Just as though I, Francis Cambremer, would allow that! Pooh! He can't refuse to go shares with me."

The impetuous chevalier impatiently waited until the unfortunate lad had taken his hat from the servant at the door; but he was discreet enough not to make his generous offer publicly. He waited till he reached the stairs, and went down behind the young fellow with the intention of accosting him at the doorway.

On the seventh step, however, Casse-Cou, who was hurrying on too swiftly, slipped and fell. As he did so his out-stretched hand came in contact with something which he mechanically seized hold of. He looked to see what it was, and it proved to be a red flower.

The chevalier, as he was always in a hurry, had very often fallen, but although he was well accustomed to falls, he felt none the less hurt by this accident on the Frascati staircase. He picked himself up with some difficulty, and remained there for a moment, rubbing his side with one hand, and holding the red flower in the other.

Under any other circumstances, the finding of this red flower would not have startled him. The beauties who habitually went to the notorious gambling-house scattered flowers about as lightly as they scattered their virtue, and flowers are made to be lost. But the one which the chevalier had found was unlike other floral tributes; it was a cluster of petals of a livid red upon a slender stem having two leaves of glittering brightness.

Casse-Cou was no botanist, and was entirely ignorant of the name of this charming specimen of the floral kingdom, still he did not doubt for a moment but what he had already seen it in the hand of the young man in the stage-box. The shape, the vivid hue were the same, and the chevalier was always inclined to believe what he wished. It thus happened that the discovery greatly perplexed him. He was strongly tempted to return to the rooms and begin his rounds over again. However, if he once more began trying to find the mysterious being whom he had followed from the Odéon, he must needs give up doing a good deed. The despairing gamester was perhaps about to destroy himself in some corner; whereas he, Casse-Cou, might perhaps save him, thanks to his own winnings; and he would have reproached himself had he thus deserted him.

Kindness of heart won the day; and, in justice to Francis Cambremer, it must be admitted that he did not deliberate more than a few seconds before he hastened to the entrance. Unfortunately, short as had been his delay, it had lasted too long, for he looked in vain up and down the street

and round the corner of the boulevard. The young man had disappeared.

The chevalier, thus forced to renounce his attempt to repair the unkindness of fate, reluctantly returned to the rooms, and again began to examine the people there. He held his flower in his hand as a talisman; but the camellia was powerless to enable him to discover the man or woman who had brought it. The only success that he met with was that he was smiled upon in the most engaging manner by the women present, whose amiability was always in readiness for those who won at play. After promenading about for half an hour, our friend was obliged to admit that his search was vain, and thereupon he sadly returned to the street.

As soon as he set foot upon the sidewalk, he involuntarily turned in the direction of his lodgings, which is to say towards the Tuileries. The direction and the driver awaiting him on the boulevard had completely gone out of his mind and he did not give them a thought. Casse-Cou was so constituted that feeling always took the precedence of interest in his mind just as fancies came before realities.

He sauntered along with his hands crossed behind him, and his head down, and he began to think over the strange adventures of the evening. He pictured the unfortunate young woman and the little girl, both perhaps, the victims of the frightful "ogre," and he resolved that on the morrow he would start a campaign and make every effort to avenge them. The good luck which he had met with at play had come at the right time. The money he had won would enable him to meet such expenses as the contest might cause, and this was fortunate, for Casse-Cou's finances were not always in a prosperous condition. He had a way of managing his affairs that often upset the balance between receipts and expenditure; however, this confusion never troubled him at all.

Thus walking along, without looking to see which way he was taking, he finally found himself in front of the Palais Royal. Midnight had not yet struck, and the galleries were as crowded as in broad daylight. The arcades which nowadays are almost deserted at night-time, were then brilliantly lighted up until the small hours of the morning. The chevalier went into the Palais by the peristyle on the Rue de Valois side, and had not taken ten steps along the colonnade before he encountered the ruined gambler whom he had seen at Frascati's rooms.

"Aha!" muttered Casse-Cou, joyfully. "I had a presentiment that providence would help me to find him!"

The young man was walking along with a hurried gait, stopping from time to time, to pass his hand through his hair as though to drive away some painful thought. However, he seemed suddenly to make up his mind, and went towards a staircase which seemed to lead to a cellar. A dim lantern swayed above the door, and the sounds of a drum came from the depths of the vault. The chevalier followed the youth, who had not noticed him, and they both reached a vaulted hall, where some shabby-looking men were drinking at wooden tables. At the farther end, a sham savage in flesh-coloured tights was playing frightful variations upon a bass-drum, while four blind men, who were playing on clarinets, did their best to make the noise complete.

Casse-Cou had heard of this establishment, which at that time was very well known indeed, but he had never entered it; and he wondered what the gambler could have come there for. He soon understood, however; for the unfortunate young fellow sank, rather than seated himself upon a

bench, took a five-franc piece from his pocket, and threw it upon the table.

"Brandy!" said he to the waiter whom the silvery chink of the coin had attracted to the spot, as if by enchantment.

"How much?" asked the dirty waiter.

"Bring me five francs' worth."

Casse-Cou had seated himself quietly beside the youth, and was gazing at him compassionately. "He intends to get drunk," thought he, "so as to muster up courage enough to make away with himself."

No one noticed the pair. The young man had placed his elbows upon the table, and turned his back to his neighbour; and when the waiter placed a full bottle and a glass before him, he poured out an immense bumper of the horrible liquid and swallowed it at once. The chevalier heaved a sigh and then laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"What do you want? and who gave you permission to touch me?" asked the youth, quickly turning toward him.

"You were very unlucky to-night at Frascati's rooms," said Casse-Cou, in a gentle tone.

"What is that to you?" replied the young fellow, looking searchingly at him. "Ah! I recognise you now," added he, with bitterness. "You staked on the black."

His face had assumed a frightful expression. The brandy which was already taking effect had distorted his mouth, and lent a wild look to his large blue eyes.

"True, I won largely," said the chevalier, "but—"

"Two 'pick ups' in twelve, and three times forty on red," muttered the unfortunate lad. The demon of play still haunted his brain, which was beginning to yield to intoxication.

"You are very young," resumed Casse-Cou, whose emotion increased.

"I am old enough to ruin myself," sneered the youth.

"Then you have nothing left?" asked the chevalier, timidly, at the same time putting his hand into the pocket in which he had thrust his notes and gold. He felt a strong desire to take out the ill-gotten wealth by the handful and lay it before his companion; but suddenly he remembered that Frascati's rooms were open all night, and that the money might find its way back there before dawn.

"Why do you ask me that?" said the young man, drily. "Do you contemplate bestowing your charity on me?" And then he again filled his glass to the brim.

"Charity? no, certainly not; but who knows but what I might be useful to you. Come now, tell me your name."

"My name? No one shall know that."

"Tell me your mother's name," insisted the chevalier, evidently desirous of softening the young gambler's heart.

"My mother!" repeated the youth in a choking voice, and he leaned over the table with his head upon his hands.

"Listen to me," said Casse-Cou, who was affected to tears; "you are suffering terribly and you greatly need rest. I live alone, and if you will accept the hospitality I offer you, I will give you my word of honour that to-morrow, whatever trouble you may be in, I will do my best to help you out of it."

"To-morrow it will be useless," replied the lad.

"Come! come!" replied the chevalier, gaily, "you cannot refuse to

accompany me home to-night. Remember that I have a thousand louis with me, and that I live in a deserted neighbourhood. You will defend me if I should be attacked."

The gambler raised his head and muttered: "True, you have a lot of gold."

"Of course I have, and I don't wish to lose it, for I know what I intend to do with it."

"Gold!" repeated the young man, whose eyes sparkled.

"Well, it's agreed, is it not? You will come with me to the Rue Férou. I will offer you a good bed, and when you wake-up in the morning we will have a talk together."

"Well, let us go then!" said the youth, and he hastily rose up, muttering as he did so, "A thousand louis! enough to break the bank twenty times over!"

The chevalier was delighted at seeing his new friend make ready to accompany him. He rubbed his hands and smiled to himself. "Ah, my little chick!" thought he, "you imagined that I would let you jump into the Seine when I had a pocketful of money. No, no! To-morrow, when you are quite sober, you shall have a talk with Francis Cambremer."

However, while the kind-hearted Casse-Cou was mentally congratulating himself upon having gone in to the cellar of "The Savage," as this establishment is called, the young man was gloomily gazing at him and he seemed to hesitate. Then he abruptly poured out another glass full of brandy and swallowed it, before his protector could prevent him from doing so.

"Take my arm," said the chevalier, kindly.

"No, I can walk alone," replied the gambler, going in the direction of the stairs as well as he was able.

His intoxication was of the kind that disturbs one's brain rather than diminishes one's strength, and when he reached the galleries he walked almost erect, although the influence of great over-excitement was visible in his unmeaning gestures and convulsive movements. The chevalier, full of triumph, determined to take advantage of the relatively satisfactory state in which he found his charge. He hurried along as fast as he could without wearying the youth, and watched him askance with fatherly solicitude. He even avoided speaking to him too often, for fear of irritating him by reminding him of his worries.

The people who had been promenading that evening about the Palais Royal, were now beginning to retire, and when Casse-Cou and his companion reached the Rue Saint Honoré they found but few passers-by there. The solitude was still greater on the Place du Carrousel and the quay. The fog had grown denser, and as the pavement was very bad, the cab-drivers had seen fit to return home, so that Paris seemed to be asleep. It was only now and then that one could hear the distant rumbling of a vehicle, or the regular pacing of a sentinel walking up and down the long gallery of the Louvre.

"Are we far from your house?" suddenly asked the young man, when they had crossed over the Pont Royal.

"In twenty minutes more at the utmost we shall be there, and you will see how soundly you will sleep."

They then entered the Rue du Bac, and after a short silence the youth resumed in a low tone: "What system did you follow to win so much money?"

"Oh! you ask more than I can answer," laughed the chevalier. "I threw

my stake upon the table without knowing what colour it would fall upon."

"You had never played before, had you?"

"Never."

"That is always the way," said the young man to himself in a low tone. "And you won twenty thousand francs?" he resumed, in a trembling voice.

"Upon my word, I have not counted the coin, but I know that there is a good deal of it," gaily said Casse-Cou, clapping his hand on the pocket of his coat. "And it is really to you that I owe my riches."

"I never enriched any one as yet," said the young gambler bitterly.

"Yes, you have enriched me, for if I hadn't had the lucky idea of following you when I saw you leave the table, I should have left my money on the table, and have lost all I had won."

"Why did you follow me?"

"Ah! that's my secret, but I will tell it you to-morrow," replied Casse-Cou.

While they were thus talking, they turned into the Ruc de Lille, then into the Rue des Saints Pères and finally reached the Rue de Grenelle. The chevalier, as he drew near to his abode, again began thinking of the mournful scene of the Odéon, but he was almost consoled as to his failure to penetrate that dark mystery. He had, by his disappointment, acquired the certainty of being able to perform a good action, and Casse-Cou, among all adventures, preferred those in which he could help the afflicted. "Although I missed the giant," he said to himself, as he turned the corner of the open space known as the Croix Rouge, "I have, at all events, been able to save a poor lad, who without me would now be at the bottom of the river."

At this moment a violent shock, followed by a feeling of sharp pain, interrupted the chevalier's reflections, and he raised his hand to his breast. At the same time he turned instinctively, and found himself facing the youth whom he had saved from suicide, and who was raising his arm to stab him again with a dagger.

"You scoundrel!" cried Casse-Cou, seizing the fellow both by the wrist and at the throat.

Fortunately, the blade had met the bank-notes won at the gaming-table, and had barely penetrated the chevalier's skin. The would-be murderer had gathered up all his remaining strength to strike the blow; thirst for gold had directed and upheld his hand, but now that the attempt had failed, intoxication got the better of this novice in crime. Vigorously held by the chevalier, he gasped for an instant, then tottered and fell heavily on to the sidewalk. Casse-Cou felt himself, found that his wound was trifling, and then leant over the traitor who had so basely requited his generous intentions.

"Ah! what a scamp!" muttered the good chevalier. "To try to kill me, and steal what I would so willingly have given him to-morrow morning! I hope that he isn't dead! That would cap the climax!"

He was soon easy as to this last point. The young fellow was sleeping that leaden slumber which falls like lightning upon the victims of alcohol.

"I cannot leave him here like that," muttered Casse-Cou.

Fortunately, providence came to his help for the second time that evening, for he heard the sound of a vehicle coming up by way of the Rue du Dragon.

"Stop! driver, stop!" he called out, starting into the middle of the

street, "twenty francs if you will help me to lift this drunken man into your cab!"

A far from flattering exclamation was the reply; however the horse stopped short. "Ah! this is a little too much!" said the driver in a hoarse voice, "you can't fool me twice, let me tell you!"

"What to the deuce do you mean?"

"Oh, that's all very well, it suits you to pretend that you don't remember me," replied the driver, coming down from his seat. "Instead of singing out 'twenty francs!' every five minutes, you would do a great deal better to pay me what you owe me for a four hours' job."

"What! is it you?" exclaimed Casse-Cou, who had recognized the owner of the mare called *La Grise*—the driver, whom he had so completely forgotten on leaving *Frascati's* rooms.

"Yes, it is! Do you know that it was not honest to leave me in the lurch like that, and cheat me out of what I had earned?"

"Take it! take it! my good fellow," replied the chevalier. "Say no more about it," and thereupon he thrust five or six gold coins into the driver's hand. "But help me to take this friend of mine to my diggings. He has been drinking too heavily. I live in the *Rue Férou*, only a little way from here."

"Oho! now it's quite a different manner!" replied the driver, enchanted with his princely pay. "Let me pick him up! I know how to handle drunkards." And taking up the sleeping man as though he had been a bale of goods, he carried him to the cabriolet, and placed him as well as he could upon the seat.

"Get up beside him," said Casse-Cou, "I will follow you on foot."

The driver obeyed, and the party reached the *Rue Férou* without meeting any one on the way. The chevalier lived on the first floor of a house which was entered by a long passage. When he reached the building, he saw with surprise that there was a light in his room. For the time being, his only servant was a housekeeper who did not remain at his rooms during the night, and the illumination consequently seemed very strange to him. However, while he was putting his key into the lock a window was opened and a voice called out: "Is it you, chevalier?"

"Hallo! Cassonade, are you there?" rejoined Casse-Cou, "what the deuce are you doing in my rooms at this time of night?"

In the meantime the driver had skilfully taken his charge out of the cabriolet, and the wretched gamester, who was not yet awake, was carried by the head and feet along the narrow hall of the house and up the stairs. On the landing Cassonade made his appearance with a candle in his hand. "Ah! chevalier, what an adventure!" said he, with a deep sigh.

"It is nothing! it is only a young fellow who has been drinking, and we will put him to bed in the blue room," replied Casse-Cou, who thought that his neighbour, the grocer, was mourning over the intoxicated youth from *Frascati*.

"That is not what I mean; good heavens, no!" replied Cassonade, raising his hands to the ceiling: "as for that tipsy lad he won't sleep in the blue room to-night."

"What the deuce do you mean? You had better help me," said the chevalier, impatiently.

"Come sir, come! look there!" resumed the grocer imploringly, and struck by his singular behaviour Casse-Cou left the sleeping gambler in the care of the driver, and followed his neighbour straight into the blue room.

"Look, chevalier!" whispered Cassonade, pointing to the bed.

"What! some one asleep," retorted Casse-Cou. "Why! upon my life it is the little girl who was at the Odéon!"

II.

IN WHICH THE CHEVALIER REGRETS THAT HE HAD NOT SUFFICIENTLY
STUDIED FOREIGN LANGUAGES.

It was really she. It was the little angel with the long brown ringlets whom the chevalier had admired in the box at the theatre, the child with the large fawn-like eyes whom he had gazed at with so much emotion when she sat beside her mother, under the cruel eyes of the "giant."

Stretched upon the bed and wrapped up to the neck in the sheet and blankets, the little girl was sleeping soundly. Casse-Cou thought that he must be dreaming, and such was his amazement that he remained mute and motionless before this unexpected sight. At last having recovered from the first shock of surprise, he was about to speak and ask for an explanation, when Cassonade hastily raised his finger to his lips, and retreated from the bed-side on tiptoe. "Don't let us wake her," said he, sadly, "it will be time enough to-morrow."

"But how does it happen that she's here?" asked the chevalier as soon as they had left the room.

"I will tell you about it presently," said Cassonade with an air of mystery; "but if you will take my advice, chevalier, we will first get rid of the person whom you have just brought here."

"That young man!" said Francis, striking his forehead, "true! I had forgotten him!"

"And may I be permitted to ask who he is?"

"A poor fellow whom I met, and who is ill."

"Ill, is he? I think that I know what kind of illness it is. I'll bet that you found him at some street-corner, sleeping off his liquor."

"Never mind! he needs care, and in such cold weather as this I could not leave the poor fellow in the street."

"Well, the watch would have taken him to the station-house, and if you like, I myself will take him there now."

"But he will be much better off here, in a good bed."

"In a bed? Whose bed? Not that poor little girl's, I hope?"

"In mine of course."

"In yours? Ah! chevalier, that's just like you!" exclaimed Cassonade.

"Come and help me! come at once!" rejoined Francis, running to the door of the room.

The faithful driver of the yellow cabriolet had remained upon the landing, after carefully depositing the still intoxicated gambler upon the tiled flooring. "No hurry, sir, no hurry," said he, laughing, for the good pay he had received had put him in a good humour; "there's no fear that your friend will stir. He's pretty full, let me tell you, and he won't open an eye before noon to-morrow, unless indeed—"

"Lend a hand, my good fellow," interrupted the chevalier; "he may take cold and—"

"How in Heaven's name can a man get himself into such a state as that?" muttered Cassonade, raising the drunken youngster's head.

The youth was then carried into Casse-Cou's room with the help of the driver, and carefully laid upon the bed. At this moment, either because the motion had aroused him, or that he had felt the change of temperature, the young man opened his eyes, but closed them almost immediately, murmuring in a faint voice: "Mother!"

"Ah! he is not such a scamp as I thought," muttered Cassonade, "for he's thinking of his mother."

The chevalier said nothing, but bit the end of his moustache, which he always did when endeavouring to control hidden emotion.

"Well, if I am of no further use to you, sir," now exclaimed the driver, "I will go back to La Grise."

"Go! my friend, go!"

"I'm greatly obliged to you, sir, and if ever you need Pierre Morillon, I'm to be found every night in the Rue de Vaugirard, at the corner of the Rue du Regard."

"Thanks. I'll remember it, if ever I want you."

"Close the door of the passage as you go out," added Cassonade, and the driver then went down stairs.

Francis, in the meantime, had taken down two or three cloaks which hung at the foot of his bed, and carefully spread them over the sleeper. The young man's mother, had she appeared in answer to his appeal, could not have done better.

When he had thus provided against his charge catching cold, the chevalier made a sign to Cassonade to follow him and then hastily entered a large apartment between the two bed-rooms. It was here that he spent most of his time; but it would have been somewhat difficult, at a first glance, to tell what purpose it was used for. It might have been a study, a fencing-room or a library. A huge oaken table occupied the centre of the apartment, in which there was an accumulation of books, papers, and weapons. On the walls there hung maps, foils, pistols, and swords.

The peaceable grocer had never entered this apartment without secret apprehensions, for all the scientific and warlike paraphernalia greatly intimidated him. He came in on this occasion on tip-toe, taking the utmost precaution in order not to tread upon any of the heterogeneous objects spread about upon the floor. His impetuous neighbour, who made his way without any difficulty among all the old books and gauntlets, set his candle upon the table, and then said in an agitated tone: "Now, speak out, my friend, tell me everything that has happened."

Cassonade desired nothing better, for he was naturally talkative, and he had a great deal to tell. But he did not know where or how to begin, and he was evidently trying to find a starting-point.

The chevalier in his impatience came to his help. "Come," said he, in the tone of a man who is trying to recall what has taken place, "I left you in the lobby near the stalls. Did you find her there?"

"The little girl?" replied the astonished grocer; "no indeed!"

"Then, pray, explain yourself!"

"Well, when you left me after you came from the commissary's office, I went to take a stroll outside during the intermission. On returning to the theatre I didn't see you anywhere, but I heard that a misfortune had occurred."

"I know that only too well," interrupted the chevalier; "the woman, that angel in the private box, was killed by the ogre."

"I heard nothing about any murder, or any ogre," replied Cassonade, ingenuously; "but I found a poor lady who was being carried away and who had suddenly expired."

"What—don't you know then—"

"Her name? No indeed! I asked everybody in the crowd but no one could tell me what it was; and I was so horrified at the sight of her big eyes, which seemed to be staring at me, that I hadn't the heart to stay there."

"Well, what afterwards, what afterwards?" said Casse-Cou, very impatiently.

"Afterwards? why I thought that I had better go to bed if I wished to be up at five, to open my shop; and so I came home by way of the Rue de Vaugirard. Ah, chevalier! it was a good thing that I made up my mind to return home so early."

"How is that?"

"Well, I'll tell you. When I came to the door of the house, and while I was trying to find my key in my pocket, I heard a strange noise at the end of the street, near the Place Saint-Sulpice. It sounded as though someone was calling out and crying. The lamp was very dim, and I couldn't see very well. However I did not wait, but ran out, and at twenty paces from the door, near the big wall there, on the left—"

"You found her!" exclaimed the chevalier.

"And it was high time I did, I assure you. The poor little creature was dying of cold, and she scarcely had the strength to cry. When I came up to her and took her in my arms, she muttered a few words that I couldn't understand, and then she grew rigid, and I didn't amuse myself with questioning her any more—"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I ran along holding her in my arms to warm her, and found the door of the passage open; and then, let me tell you, I took the liberty of taking the key of your rooms from under the mat—"

"That was right, Cassonade!"

"Well, you understand, chevalier, that in the hole where I sleep, over the shop, there's no fireplace, and I'm not well provided with blankets; but in your rooms—"

"I should never have forgiven you if you hadn't come here. The child didn't wake up, then?"

"Not at all! While I was laying her upon the bed in the blue room, she threw her little arms round my neck—I think that she took me for her mother—but she did not open her eyes, and she has not stirred from that time to this."

"Cassonade," said the chevalier, "from this day forth you may look upon me as a brother."

"I only did my duty," stammered the grocer, "and if I can find the little one's relatives, I shall be amply rewarded."

"Her relatives!—why don't you know—"

"What?"

"That she is the daughter of the lady who was murdered?"

"What lady?" asked Cassonade, in amazement.

"The lady whom the ogre killed in the private box."

The grocer looked at his neighbour with a kind of compassion. He thought that he was giving way to his usual fanciful notions.

"To-morrow she will wake up, and she will speak," exclaimed Casse Cou; "to-morrow we will know everything. And then I shall be able to trace the ogre, and avenge the dark-eyed princess. You must help me, Cassonade."

"With all my heart, chevalier, but—"

"No buts! the ogre must die!"

"I'm perfectly willing, still—"

"Oh, how long it seems to have to wait till to-morrow!" sighed Francis Cambremer without listening to the voice of reason which came from the lips of the grocer. "He will have time to get away, the scoundrel!—and escape like his accomplice, the young man with the red camellia, and then—"

At this moment the chevalier was interrupted by a sharp cry from the blue room.

"It is she! it is the little girl!" exclaimed Cassonade.

"She is suffering, she will die, perhaps!"

"Ah, poor child! let us go to her at once, chevalier."

But Francis did not need any urging to make haste. He had already taken up a candle and rushed into the blue room. He made but one stride from the table to the door. Cassonade followed him as nimbly as his much heavier frame would allow of, at the same time uttering exclamations in a low tone, expressive of his anxiety.

The first thing that the chevalier caught sight of was the little girl standing up, her eyes wild with terror, and her arms extended as though to ward off some frightful sight. The room was in the same state as when Francis had left it; no one had entered, and the child's cries were easily explained by the fear which she had naturally experienced upon waking up in the dark. The chevalier, somewhat less alarmed at this thought, set down his candle, and hastened up to the little girl, saying in his softest tones: "Don't be afraid, my dear child."

But instead of becoming calmer the child began to run away from Francis whose arms were held out to her, and took refuge near the window.

"It is I, my little love," now said Cassonade, "it was I who brought you here. It was I who laid you upon Monsieur Cambremer's nice soft bed."

However the grocer's soothing remarks produced no good effect. Either because she did not recognise her protector, or did not understand what he said to her, the little girl remained crouching against the wainscoting and tried to hide herself behind the curtain.

"My child," resumed the chevalier, "we don't want to do you any harm; we are your friends, and to-morrow we will take you back to your—family."

He had been on the point of saying: "to your mother," but he did not dare to speak the word; for the horrible sight in the box at the theatre rose up before his eyes. However, he obtained no reply from the poor little waif, and when he attempted to approach her, she seemed so terrified that he drew back. Francis, although his heart was deeply moved, did not know what means he could resort to, which would enable him to win the confidence of the poor frightened girl.

"Tell me the name and address of your parents," he murmured in a still softer voice, "and I give you my promise that I will take you to them."

The little girl did not stir, but she began to sob.

"What is to be done, in Heaven's name! what is to be done?" said the chevalier to himself, in consternation.

The child's grief wrung his heart, and he looked sadly at Cassonade as if to ask him for his advice. The grocer, less sensitive, but quite as much surprised, smote his brow, in the hope of bringing some useful idea into his head. Francis was beginning to think that he had better go away in order to give the child time to recover herself; however, he feared lest she might be still more frightened if she was left alone. While he was thus pondering, his grief overcame him more and more, and at last he sank down upon his knees. "Speak to me, I beg of you!" said he, joining his hands, "speak to me, in heaven's name, in the name of her who loved you so well, in the name of—"

The good chevalier did not dare to proceed. The final appeal which he had made did not seem to make any impression upon the little girl. She remained motionless; her large, black eyes, which were fixed upon Francis, expressed mingled fear and surprise; her lips parted to speak, but they quivered and did not give vent to a sound. It was a strange and touching sight: this tall, bony, powerful man at the feet of the little child. Cambremer with his sharp tanned face, and bent down in this humble posture, looked like some mediæval warrior kneeling before a Gothic image of the Virgin Mary.

"I have an idea!" suddenly exclaimed the ingenious Cassonade.

The chevalier was so engrossed in gazing at the child, that he did not at first grant this announcement the attention which it deserved.

"Only a woman can help us out of this," resumed the grocer.

"A woman?" ejaculated Casse-Cou in surprise.

"Yes, sir, the child is afraid of us because we are not like her mother; but if, instead of seeing your big moustaches and my fat phiz, she saw a woman's gentle face, I'm sure she'd become quiet at once."

"You are right, perhaps, my friend," replied Francis, cautiously rising up; "but I don't know anyone who can—"

"Why, our neighbours, they will do."

"Our neighbours?"

"Yes, that worthy Madame Mongis and her daughter, Mademoiselle Marthe, two real angels from heaven."

"True; I hadn't thought of them," muttered the chevalier, "but do you think they would consent?"

"To come and console the little one? I'm sure they would! They take care of the sick for nothing, and stint themselves of everything to help the poor. They are just like two sisters of charity."

"Yes, yes, I know how kind-hearted and devoted they are, but at this hour—"

"Ah! there's no danger of their being a-bed. You know that they toil day and night, for they are far from being rich, poor ladies!"

"No, and when I think that they would never accept—"

"Any help? Oh! they are too proud for that, for they are the widow and daughter of an officer. So it's easy to understand, you know! But let me manage the matter, chevalier: I have only a flight of stairs to climb, it won't take long, and in five minutes you'll see!"

Thereupon Cassonade, without waiting for a reply, darted towards the door and disappeared with a rapidity which, considering his bulk, almost seemed impossible.

Francis, as soon as he was alone with his frightened charge, went slowly to the further end of the room to show her that he had no wish to frighten her. The child seemed to understand this, for she did not appear to be as much terrified as before. Tears still streamed down her cheeks, but the expression of her eyes was less wild, and her sobs had ceased. The chevalier thought that Cassonade's promise was perhaps working a happy change, and he rejoiced in the hope of an approaching end to the dilemma. His excitable brain was at work with the dark enigma of the Odéon, and he had no doubt but what his kind neighbours would succeed in inducing the child to speak.

"She doesn't know that her poor mother is dead," he thought, "but she will tell Madame Mongis her name, and the ogre's name, and where she lives, and to-morrow—"

He had reached this point in his soliloquy, when the door opened and Cassonade re-appeared, bringing in the tenants from the second floor. "Come to our help, ladies," said Francis, eagerly, "this poor little girl—"

"I know all about it, Monsieur Cambremer, and I thank you for having thought of sending for me," replied Madame Mongis, holding out her hand to the chevalier.

It was easy to realise, merely on hearing the voice of the speaker, that Cassonade had not exaggerated her good qualities; and her face was in keeping with her voice. It would be hard to find a more gentle and sweeter countenance than that of the widowed Madame Mongis. She seemed to be forty at the utmost, and must have been extremely pretty in previous years. The almost nun-like simplicity of her attire only set off the distinction of her pale, delicate, regular features. As for her daughter, the latter was a wonder of beauty and grace, especially of grace, for her fair hair and black eyes were even less admirable than the indefinable charm that pervaded her entire person.

"Come, my dear child," said Madame Mongis, to the little waif, at the same time stepping forward, with a smile and open arms.

Then, to the great astonishment, and still greater delight of the chevalier, the little girl, instead of flying from this motherly call, let fall the curtain, which she had wrapped about her, made a step or two forward, still hesitating, and finally flung her arms about the good lady's neck, crying out: "*Imma! Imma!*"

"What does she say?" muttered Cassonade.

"Wipe her eyes, my dear Marthe," exclaimed Madame Mongis, addressing her daughter, who made haste to do as she was requested.

The child permitted it, and as soon as the traces of her tears had disappeared she began to kiss both women, uttering broken words with extraordinary rapidity.

"That's not a Christian tongue that she's speaking!" exclaimed the grocer.

The widow listened with the utmost attention to the strangely sounding words which came from the little one's rosy lips, and the amazed chevalier vainly endeavoured to understand the meaning of what she said.

"That's why she didn't answer us, she didn't understand," remarked the sagacious Cassonade.

"Mother, it isn't English that she's speaking," said Marthe, in a low tone.

"Nor German," murmured Madame Mongis.

"Nor Spanish, nor Italian, nor Greek," added Cambremer, who had travelled a great deal.

"Don't you understand French at all, my darling?" asked the widow, taking care to speak very slowly.

The little girl replied in words which were as unintelligible as her previous ones.

"Alas!" said the chevalier, with an air of profound discouragement, "it is clear that we shall learn nothing from this child. Nothing, not even the name of the monster who killed her mother!"

Meanwhile, Madame Mongis gazed at the little one, and seemed to reflect. Her daughter Marthe, much less interested in the singular problem of the child's language, busied herself with drying her tears. The chevalier lamented, and Cassonade sighed as though he had been trying to set a windmill in motion.

"Well! sir," said the widow at last, "I think that for to-night it is useless to try to make this poor little lost angel speak; but, fortunately, my face does not repel her, and if you are willing—"

"You will take charge of her for the night!" exclaimed Francis.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur Cambremer, with the greatest pleasure. Ten years ago or so, I had the misfortune to lose a child, who would be of her age now, and I shall be only too glad to give her some of the love that I felt for my daughter."

"Mother, she shall be my little sister," said Marthe, bending over so as to whisper her words in Madame Mongis's ear.

"Madame! mademoiselle! how good you are!" exclaimed the chevalier, who would never have ventured to hope for this natural issue to the difficulty into which his kind heart had brought him.

"Besides," said Cassonade, "I will go to-morrow morning to see old Mouillard, the public scrivener of the Odéon gallery. He speaks all the languages under the sun, and will soon find some way of understanding what the little one says."

"I hope so," said Madame Mongis, smiling, for she had but a poor opinion of the learning of the polyglot scribe of the Odéon gallery. "However, if no quicker way can be found, I think that I shall soon succeed in making our poor little waif understand French."

"And I shall find her family," declared the chevalier, who never doubted the possibility of achieving anything that he undertook.

He already longed for sunrise, in order that he might visit all the authorities in the city. He was convinced that the government ought to devote its attention exclusively to the drama of the Odéon, and he had no doubt but that at every rung of the hierarchal ladder he would find functionaries as zealous as himself.

The young heroine of the scene had now become quite calm again. She gazed with her large, sad, mild eyes at the two women who were endeavouring to console her, but she did not say anything more, as though she had realised that it was idle to talk to persons who did not understand her. Suddenly, however, she took hold of Madame Mongis's hand, and kissed it with so warm an expression of respectful tenderness, that the kind lady took her in her arms and pressed her to her heart.

This thoroughly Oriental mark of submission set the chevalier's imagination at work, and opened vast fields of conjecture in his mind; and he almost believed that the little girl was a young slave escaped from some Asiatic seraglio. However, Cassonade undertook to bring him back to the realities of the Rue Férou.

"She is sleepy," said the grocer, pointing to the child's heavy eyes.

"Yes, and so good-bye till to-morrow, sir," said the widow, who already held the hand of her little charge in her own, "and no matter what may happen, dispose of me as though I had the happiness of being this poor girl's mother."

Francis had great difficulty in preventing himself from embracing Madame Mongis. He limited himself, however, to thanking her most warmly, and he accompanied her to the door, bowing respectfully to Mademoiselle Marthe, whom he looked upon as a saint. As for the child, he had ventured to kiss her brow, and she had not shrunk from the touch of his moustache. It seemed as though the ladies from the second floor had been able to overcome all her timidity.

"Well, now, sir, you must confess that I had a splendid idea!" exclaimed Cassonade, when he found himself alone with the chevalier, in the room where the books and arms were kept.

"Excellent, my friend, excellent!" replied Francis, enthusiastically, "and would to Heaven that you hadn't left me at that cursed theatre."

"It wasn't my fault, chevalier; at the moment that I reminded you that you had promised the commissary not to go up to the first tier, you flew off like a bird, and I couldn't catch you again."

"Yes," replied Cambremer, with a contrite air, "I am a madman as everybody calls me, and I shall never be anything else."

"But if you would try—" timidly remarked the grocer.

"No, I cannot! When I see the good suffer, and the wicked exult, I must come forward and try to have justice done."

"Humph! the good!" repeated Cassonade. "Is that chap a good fellow—that youngster you picked up intoxicated at the corner of some street, and who is snoring away in your bed as though he had never done anything else all his life?"

"Don't you see that he isn't twenty years of age yet, and that if a man does anything wrong at his time of life, it is without knowing it?"

The grocer shook his head with the air of a man who doubted the truth of this optimist axiom. "Why, what is that?" he suddenly asked, catching sight of a great rent in Casse-Cou's coat, which showed that his shirt was slightly stained with blood.

"That's nothing. I got caught in the apron of the cabriolet," said Francis, hastily raising his hand to his breast.

"Ah, chevalier, you will always be the same!" exclaimed Cassonade, in a tone of affectionate reproach.

"Well, why am I upon earth," cried Cambremer proudly, "if not to repair wrongs?"

"That will bring you to the station-house one of these days," muttered the grocer, who remembered the chevalier's perilous leap at the theatre, and the enforced interview with the commissary of police.

"What! Heaven has thrown in my way to-night, a woman and a child who are the victims of a ferocious monster, and a young man carried away by a terrible vice, and you think that I shall let such things go on?"

"But you cannot prevent it, sir."

"I don't know whether I can or not, but I do know that I will prevent it!" replied the chevalier, in an inspired tone. "I will avenge the woman, save the child, and cure the lad; and I swear it by my name Casse-Cou!"

Francis Cambremer only swore by his nickname on very solemn occasions, and Cassonade who was well acquainted with his peculiarities started as he heard his neighbour take this oath. "This is the final freak," thought

the compassionate grocer, "he will spend the trifle that remains to him over this business, and afterwards if these rascals leave him alive, all that he will be able to do, will be to go and get killed in Algeria."

The chevalier was thousands of leagues from such thoughts as these. He grew more and more excited, as he strode up and down the room gesticulating, as though he were already running imaginary enemies through the body. "Cassonade!" he exclaimed, stopping short all at once, "you are devoted to me, are you not?"

"As for that, sir, I am entirely devoted to you; I'm like a spaniel."

"Well then, will you go with me?"

"What! do you want to move from the Rue Férou?"

"Will you follow me in war, and help me to pursue and fight the ogre?"

The grocer now concluded that his neighbour had indeed lost his wits, and in order not to contend with him, he adroitly replied: "I should be quite willing, chevalier, upon my word, to go to war with you, but please remember that I must attend to my shop."

"I'll buy it of you."

"That would be a bad bargain, and both of us would lose by it. By dint of retailing candles and raisins, I do manage to live after a fashion; but the money that you would pay me for my poor business wouldn't as much as enable me to get water to drink. Besides, it would perhaps inconvenience you," added Cassonade, timidly.

"What if I gave you five thousand francs, cash down?"

"That is exactly twice what the business is worth," replied the honest grocer, "and I shouldn't like to take you in."

"Never mind about me! I won twenty thousand francs this evening."

"Twenty thousand francs! Oh! then—but no—there's my wife, you know," replied Cassonade, driven back to his last entrenchment.

"True, I hadn't thought of her."

"But I have, although I don't often see her. Good heavens! what would my dear Pétronille say if she knew—But—" added the grocer, as though he had suddenly changed his mind, "perhaps the five thousand francs might make her reflect."

"I'll talk to her to-morrow, then. Where does she live?"

"In the Faubourg Saint Jacques; but she's more often to be found at the Saint Michel Bridge, for you know that she is head laundress—"

"Well then, I'll undertake to coax her into consenting," said Cambremer, with a resolute gesture.

Cassonade, on his side, seemed to be busy thinking. He had taken off his fur cap and was scratching his forehead. "Without being over curious, chevalier," said he, after having continued this exercise for a moment, "may I ask what it is that you wish to employ me at?"

"I wish you to serve me on all occasions, as squires formerly served the knights-errant."

The grocer had no very clear idea of what the duties of a squire might be, but he thought fit to content himself with this explanation for the time being. In point of fact, the prospect of quitting his business did not greatly displease him, for it was a poor one. Besides, he had a lively affection for his adventurous neighbour, and a perfect horror of the quarrels which his wife Pétronille frequently picked with him.

"Upon my word, sir!" he exclaimed, after a somewhat lengthy pause, "we must talk it all over to-morrow, and for the present I think that you would do as well to take a little rest. Madame Mongis has taken charge

of the little girl ; the youngster, to whom you have given up your bed, is sleeping like a log. It's time you did the same, and so I'll wish you good-night."

"How I wish that the morning had come!" muttered the chevalier as he continued pacing up and down the room.

He might well have gone to rest after so many emotions, for he would still have had the right to say, like Titus, that he had not lost his day. It is true that his bed was occupied, but the one in the blue room was free, and now or never was the time to take the sleep so nobly earned. He even had some desire to stretch himself on the bed where the child had laid, and try to sleep ; but his imagination was so busy that he thought rest impossible at that moment. So in order to quiet himself somewhat, he seated himself at his oaken table, and began turning over the leaves of a romance of the days of chivalry.

This was his favourite amusement, and at the same time he found it the best remedy for the fancies of his excitable brain. When he felt that he was rushing on too hastily with some hazardous enterprise, he read the "Song of Roland ;" or "The History of the Knights of the Round Table." The fabulous exploits of the heroes of the middle ages, and their marvellous sword-thrusts, made him feel a contempt for the paltry encounters of modern life ; and after an hour or two spent in travel through the past, he looked more sensibly at the present.

On that night, however, he vainly plunged into the heroic narratives. He could not succeed in entirely ridding himself of the realities which had occurred during the evening. In the cuts which adorned the old volume before him, he fancied that he saw the various incidents of the struggle which he intended to carry on with the persecutors of the black-haired angel. The faces of the felonious enchanters seemed to him to be like that of the bearded colossus who had occupied the box at the Odéon, and he imagined that he himself was couching a lance, and wearing the steel armour of a knight of the olden time.

The fact was, that for the first time in his life, perhaps, Francis had met with an adventure such as he had dreamed of for years ; for he had passed his life in running after improbabilities, and improbabilities had fled from him with the same obstinacy as he had pursued them. He had been born at Saint Malo in the days of the Consulate, and had spent his boyhood in listening to bulletins of victories, and in impatiently waiting for the age when he might begin to fight. However, the fall of the Empire brought his warlike hopes to the ground. His father, a brave seaman, who had cruised in every sea with his privateer, had talked to him from his boyhood up about sea-fights and boarding vessels, and had intended that he should enter the navy. Unfortunately, M. Cambremer senior had died six months before the allied armies entered France ; and Francis, who had lost his mother when he was born, found himself an orphan at thirteen years of age. At his majority he came into possession of a snug little fortune gloriously won by his father from the English ; and then, not being able to fight, he longed to travel. However, the irony of fate had always condemned him to remain on land. Descended from a race of navigators, born in a town where every man is a sailor, he was none the less subject to seasickness to such a degree, that he came near dying on his first trip on the briny deep.

This was a cruel disappointment to him, and he felt it so keenly that he determined to leave Brittany. The mere sight of a ship sorely affected

him. So he repaired to Paris, and under pretence of studying the law, he installed himself in the Quartier Latin, where he fought several duels and engaged in a few love affairs. However, to his great surprise, he found, at the expiration of two or three years, that this kind of life did not suit him at all. It was all very well for him to fight on all sorts of stupid pretexts and to make love in every direction; he did not find his ideal.

It was about this time that great public enthusiasm was displayed for the independence of Greece, and the romantic student took care not to lose so good a chance of giving a form to his dreams. He set sail for the Morea, reached the port of Nauplia after incredible sufferings, and, upon setting foot on Hellenic soil, he was taken with a malignant fever, which kept him to his bed for a month. Six weeks afterwards the doctors sent him back to France with the express injunction never again to return to the unhealthy land of Themistocles.

The sea was forbidden him; war would not take him, and thus poor Cambremer was forced to resign himself to the prosaic life of a quiet citizen. This was a heavy blow; but Heaven sent him consolation. He fell in love, and this time with his whole soul. He wooed and married a charming young girl. Fifteen months later, he was a widower and the father of a little girl, who engrossed his every thought. The child was about four years old when she expired in his arms with an attack of quinsy. Francis was then again left alone in the world.

There was nothing upon earth to interest him, and he resolved to lead an entirely different life. Abruptly breaking off all his old connections, he turned his fortune into money, deposited his funds at the Bank of France, and went to live in the lonely Rue Férou. There he arranged for himself an existence which study and charitable works almost entirely filled up, but which was not lacking in eccentricity. In the first place, he had simplified money matters by drawing upon his capital whenever he needed any cash; moreover he did not receive any visitors, and he never read the papers. His sole occupation consisted in searching for people afflicted with misfortunes and consoling them with presents from his purse, and in righting wrongs whenever he had an opportunity to do so. The remainder of his time was passed in the realm of fancy, that is to say, in dreaming of impossible generosity and chimerical expeditions.

It must be admitted that in his career as a benefactor of the poor and a defender of the weak his usual ill-luck persistently accompanied him. All the sufferers he came across were willing and eager to accept money, and all his expeditions proved easy and void of excitement. He scarcely ever had a chance of risking his life for the sake of other people, excepting two or three times at fires, three times in the water, and four or five times in duels. These varied exploits had won him the name of Casse-Cou, which he accepted without any resentment. However he was not happy.

The perpetual toil which went on in his brain kept him in a state of permanent excitement; and for want of sufficient nourishment, his physical and moral activity threatened to destroy him. He wore out his heart by dint of inflating it with a desire to espouse some noble cause, and his brain as well by allowing it to dwell perpetually upon generous projects. In the height of a crisis, he would sometimes make up his mind to divert himself a little, and on these occasions he would avail himself of the right of entry to the Odéon which his former connections had procured

for him. Thus every now and then he would go there to see some tragedy of the old school, or to witness the first performance of a new play. It was a chance of the kind which, on this memorable evening, had at last brought him an adventure such as he had been on the look-out for, ever since his boyhood.

In his opinion—and he knew all about dangerous ventures—everything augured well for the success of the venture on which he was about to embark. Persecuted innocence to avenge, wickedness to punish, a wanderer to bring back to the right path, nothing was wanting in the programme which might have tempted Amadis des Gaules himself. And, by rare good luck, Francis had at the very outset found intelligent and devoted auxiliaries; Madame Mongis and her daughter had been at hand at the very moment when needed, to take charge of the child who might have stood in the way of the *Odyssey* which he, Cambremer, contemplated.

He had been acquainted with his neighbours for more than two years, and felt the deepest admiration for them. The similarity that existed between the widow's misfortunes and his own, had led to their first acquaintance; the sight of Madame Mongis's virtues had done the rest. The chevalier's discreetly expressed sympathy was reciprocated by the mother and the daughter. Still their personal intercourse was very slight, and it had required such an occurrence as the miraculous rescue of the child, to bring the ladies from the second floor into Cambremer's rooms, which he never allowed any one to enter if he could help it. Francis congratulated himself on the widow's visit, as he turned over the leaves of his old romance; but he was still better pleased at having succeeded in attracting into his adventurous orbit so quiet and peaceful a being as Cassonade. Without admitting it to himself, Cambremer had, on more than one occasion, admired and envied the sound good sense with which nature had endowed the grocer, and now that he considered himself bound to watch over the interests and welfare of others, he greatly relied upon so rational a helpmate.

Jacques Courapi  , called Cassonade, had been born at the Halles, where his parents were nothing more than hucksters. He was a few years younger than the chevalier, but he was far beyond him in the practical science of life; and experience dearly purchased in carrying on two or three different avocations, enabled him to deal ably with the commonplace difficulties which baffled Cambremer. He had been an errand-boy, then a clerk, then a servant, then a laundress's husband, and finally he had succeeded in purchasing a little grocer's business, which brought him in just enough money to live upon in a meagre sort of way. This was the very man needed to perfect the good qualities, and attenuate the strong feelings of the chevalier. Accordingly Cambremer, by dint of meditating upon the advantages of Cassonade's assistance, concluded that he was sure of final success. He shut up his book, and began pacing about the room, reflecting as to how he should employ the morning of the following day. He intended to begin with the young fellow who now was slumbering in the next room, and it at once occurred to him to find out whether he was still asleep and comfortable, so he softly opened the door, and looked in. The bed was empty.

The chevalier thought at first that he must be mistaken, for the room was somewhat dark, but on approaching the bed, he was obliged to admit that the sleeper had left it. This was truly astonishing; Francis had not left the next room for an instant, nor had he heard the slightest noise. In the first moment of surprise he almost believed that some wicked

magician had played him a trick, or,—and this to him was the same thing—that the ogre of the theatre had interfered in the matter, for the events of the evening were growing confused in his mind, and without knowing why, he began to mix up the young man's story with that of the Odéon.

However while he was reflecting upon this singular occurrence, the door of the next room softly opened and the gambler came in on tip-toe. At sight of Francis, whose tall figure appeared lit up by the candle which was in the next room, the youngster drew back as if anxious to fly.

"Don't be afraid, my dear boy, you are with a friend," called out the chevalier.

"A friend!—but—I don't know you," stammered the young man.

His face expressed the most comical astonishment, and it was easy to guess what had happened to him. The heavy sleep of intoxication having come to an end, he had woken up in an unknown apartment without being able to understand how he had come there, for one of the first effects of alcohol is to disturb the memory. Yielding to a vague instinct, he had then risen to find some way out of this house in which he felt ill at ease, and he had been wandering about without managing to discover the staircase.

"Don't you remember that we became acquainted at Frascati's?" said Cambremer, in a lively tone.

The youth's face already pale now turned livid, and a nervous trembling seized him.

"I must look very dreadful," resumed the chevalier, going towards him, with both hands outstretched.

"It was you, then, who sat beside me at the 'Savage,'" exclaimed the young fellow; "it was you whom I—"

He could not finish, for the words expired in his throat, and his knees gave way under him.

"Why, yes, indeed it was I," said Cambremer, sustaining him, to prevent him from falling to the floor, "and you see that I have no bad intentions regarding you, since I have given you a good lodging for the night."

"Yes, I understand," muttered the gambler, talking to himself, "he has shut me up here in order to be sure that I sha'n't escape him, and to-morrow morning he will send word to the police."

"Come," continued the chevalier, "come, sit down and talk a little with me; I am sure that we have a great deal to say to each other."

He had taken the youth's arm and drawn him into the next room, laughing as he did so. The young fellow allowed himself to be dragged along with the indifference of a criminal being led to prison.

"Sit down there, my friend, and let us chat a bit," said Francis, offering him an arm-chair, on which some various objects were lying. Among other things, there was a pair of pistols resting on an atlas with a leather binding. "Well, you see, I am not very orderly," resumed the chevalier, "and all my chairs are full. However, by managing a little, you can squeeze in. Lay all those things on the table, and—"

He did not finish, however, for the young gambler had hastily taken up one of the pistols, and, putting it to his head, had pulled the trigger. But only a sharp click was heard—the weapon had probably missed fire.

"You unhappy man!" exclaimed Cambremer, wrenching the pistol out of his hand. "Isn't it already enough that you attempted to kill me to-night—"

"Ah, sir," said the lad, in a hoarse voice, "you well know that I am disgraced, that I have more than once already deserved to die— Have pity upon my family!—let me blow out my brains—!"

"What! madman that you are, do you imagine that I took the trouble to follow you and bring you here, to help you to commit suicide? What nonsense! In the first place, let me tell you that none of my pistols are loaded and that you would have a great deal of trouble in killing yourself with my halberds or old swords."

"You are merciless, then, sir, and have determined to hand me over to the police."

"What the deuce do you mean by that?" cried the chevalier.

"I can't understand all this," stammered the young man.

"Sit down, and listen to me, if you wish to understand. Come now," began Cambremer, as soon as his charge was seated in the arm-chair, "the great sins with which you have to reproach yourself to-night are having lost your money in the first place, and getting drunk in the next. That is no reason for wishing to die at—how old are you?"

"Nearly twenty."

"Well then, at nearly twenty."

"There is one thing that you forget, and another that you don't know," said the young gambler, bitterly.

"What do you mean, my young friend?"

"You forget that I tried to kill you in order to rob you—"

"Bah! bah! none of that!—you had drunk half a bottle of brandy, and you did not know what you were doing."

"You are not aware that the money with which I played did not belong to me—that it had been intrusted to me, and that I made a bad use of it."

"It was a deposit that you ought to restore?"

"Which I must return to-morrow, or rather this morning."

"Good heavens! I wasn't sure of it, but I thought there was something of the kind."

"Well, as you are so clear-sighted, you must know what awaits me."

"Nothing very disagreeable that I know of. You must go to the person to whom the money belongs, and give it to him."

"True, and as I have no means of doing so—"

"I beg your pardon, you have one," said the chevalier, mildly.

"What may that be?"

"A very simple one! Just take a pen, ink and paper, and write out a receipt for the sum you need, and I will hand it to you immediately."

"What, sir!" exclaimed the youth in a voice which trembled with emotion, "do not deceive me, I beg of you. I hope that you are not doing so—it would be too cruel!"

"Poor boy!" said the chevalier, taking his hand, "don't you understand that I have been watching over you ever since you left Frascati's, so that I might save you?"

"And I attempted— Ah! I am a scoundrel!" cried the young man, striking his forehead with a gesture of despair.

"Hush! don't say any more about that, but let us speak seriously. In the first place, I must tell you there is a condition."

"Ah!"

"You must tell me all about yourself, and I will be as frank. As I hope that we shall now be friends, we must become acquainted with each other."

"Ah, sir, my story isn't a long one," replied the youth, half crazy with

delight. "My name is Paul Vernier. My mother is a widow, and has no one but me in the world. She lives at Saint-Omer on the income from a farm which is all that she possesses, for my father, after being rich, was almost ruined by—by gambling. It is from him, alas ! that I inherit this terrible vice."

"Then yesterday wasn't the first time?" asked Cambremer.

"No—I played once before. But let me finish my story. Six months ago, my mother, fearing that the idle life of a country town would do me harm, sent me to Paris with a letter to a banker, who had formerly had business relations with our family. He received me very cordially, and took me as his secretary, promising that he would interest himself in my future, if I behaved well." In speaking of his situation with the banker, Paul Vernier's voice had changed. "Yesterday," he continued, in a lower tone, "Monsieur Bousenna sent me to collect some money from one of his customers—"

"The banker's name is Bousenna, then ? what a strange name ?"

"He is of foreign origin, and hasn't been living long in Paris. He sent me to receive a sum of ten thousand francs."

"Ah ! so much the better !"

"Why ?"

"I was afraid that it might be more," muttered the chevalier, whose funds were by no means inexhaustible.

"When Monsieur Bousenna gave me this order it was nearly four o'clock and the office was about to close; he was to be away all the evening so it seemed likely that I should be obliged to keep this money about me all night."

"Poor boy ! it looks as though this man had been trying to throw temptation in your way."

"I don't think so ; but if he had such a thought he could not have succeeded better. As soon as the money was in my pocket, I fairly lost my head. It seemed to me that the bank-notes in my pocket-book were burning a hole in my breast. I mistrusted myself, I wanted to go home and to bed ; but I no longer knew what I was about. The man who had paid me, lived in the Rue d'Anjou, and to go to the Porte Saint-Denis where I live, I had to pass in front of Frascati's—"

"I guess the rest ! You went in and—"

"And I won, yes, sir, I won ! A first *series* on the red gave me seventy-two thousand francs. I ought to have got up and gone away, and taken this fortune with me, or have altered my play and staked on the black, and followed your lucky lead ; I should now be rich, and I could—"

"Say no more, you unhappy boy !" exclaimed Cambremer, terrified at this outburst of the passion which was still preying upon Paul Vernier's heart.

"Oh, sir !" said the young man, in a state of intense excitement, "it is easy to see that you know nothing of the struggle against the blind deity called chance, and what it is to conquer it, and hold it under your feet, and feel that it rises up and escapes from you !"

A timid ring at the door-bell appropriately interrupted this hymn of praise to the demon of the gaming table.

"Who the deuce can that be at this hour ?" said Cambremer.

"But look !" said the young man, "it is already daybreak."

This was true. When Francis plunged into the perusal of his romances of chivalry, he utterly forgot the lapse of time, and the night had flown by

without his knowing it. "You are right," said he, "it is already light, and this may be my friend Cassonade ; he always rises before dawn." As Cambremer spoke, he went towards the ante-room followed by Paul, who, since the chevalier had made his promise, seemed to be afraid of losing sight of him.

Francis opened the door, and to his great surprise he found himself face to face with Mademoiselle Martha Mongis.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for disturbing you so early, but I thought that you would be glad to hear something of the dear little girl," she said.

"Oh thanks ! mademoiselle," replied Cambremer, warmly.

"She is now sleeping, but she woke up twice during the night, and you should have seen how she threw her arms around mamma's neck !"

Paul Vernier was standing behind the chevalier, and Martha had not caught sight of him at first. But when she did, she gave a cry of surprise, and pulled up a little wrapper which had slipped from her shoulders.

In the simple morning attire she now wore, Madame Mongis's daughter was charming to behold. Her woollen dress defined her round flexible figure as graceful as that of a duchess, and her luxuriant light hair framed her fresh face much better than any head-dress would have done. Paul looked at her with almost passionate admiration, and the impression made upon him by this lovely apparition must have been great indeed, to make him all at once forget the gaming-table, the banker, and the money. Martha modestly cast down her eyes, but she would not have been a woman had she not found time to stealthily examine Paul, and it must be said that he was very handsome. He had a high white forehead, a mild and intelligent expression, red lips, and a countenance that was both amiable and gay when the devouring thirst for gold did not disfigure it.

Cambremer espied the rapid exchange of sympathetic glances, and smiled to himself at a thought which came into his head. His imagination was never so lively as when building up schemes to ensure the happiness of others. "Who knows," thought he, "but what in time I might make two persons happy?"

"Good-bye for the present, sir," now said Martha ; "I am going for our milk, and I am already late. When our little angel wakes up, I want to have a nice warm cupful ready for her."

All this was said in a sweet voice, and with an air of cordial gaiety, that went straight to the chevalier's heart. "My dear neighbour," he replied, laughing, "I really don't know how it is that I have been so lucky as to become a tenant in the same house as you, and I can never repay you for your kindness last night."

"Oh, yes, you can, by letting us keep the little girl. You don't know how much we love her already."

Cambremer's face regained its sad expression. He was thinking that the time was fast approaching when the mournful mystery must be cleared up, and he was asking himself what might be in store for the poor little orphan.

"I will go to see Madame Mongis to-day," he said, making an effort to conceal his sad feelings, "that is, as soon as I can obtain the information which I need as to the child's family."

"Oh ! I hope that we sha'n't be obliged to give her up."

"And I may perhaps ask permission," added the chevalier, "to introduce my young friend, Monsieur Paul Vernier, to your mother."

On hearing this, Martha blushed, and bowed with a modest grace which

suited her admirably. Then she tripped down stairs as lightly as a bird.

"What a charming girl!" said the young man, as soon as she had disappeared.

"Do you still regret that my pistol wasn't loaded?" gaily rejoined Cambremer.

A cloud passed before Paul's eyes. In thought he again witnessed the events of the night and beheld the face of the banker who would ask him to account for the money which he had so shamefully squandered.

"Come," resumed the chevalier, "let us drop the ugly story we were talking over just now, and you—sign the receipt for the ten thousand francs."

The young man started, and his face brightened again.

"At what time must you present yourself at the office?" said Francis, as they went towards the sitting room.

"Monsieur Bousenna comes down to his private room at seven in the morning."

"The deuce he does! Then we have no time to lose."

"What! sir, do you wish—"

"To go with you? Certainly I do! Is there any reason why I should not?"

"No, indeed!" stammered the young man, "excepting that I fear your being with me may seem strange, and—"

"And that your employer may mistrust you when he sees you brought back by somebody whom he does not know?"

Paul nodded affirmatively.

"In that case be at ease; I will find a very natural excuse for coming."

The chevalier—"break-neck" though he was—had some good sense, and had special reasons for wishing to accompany his charge. Frascati's rooms were not open at daybreak, but Cambremer knew that a gambler's heart is never closed to hope, and he mistrusted the fever which arises from the possession of a large amount of money.

"By taking him back myself," thought he, "I shall be sure that he will pay over the money, and when once he has done so I will prevent that man from tempting him again. Here is the cash," said he to Paul, taking several bank notes out of his pocket, "and here are writing materials."

Paul Vernier did not need to be asked twice to give his signature for the money, and Cambremer, who was looking at him, saw his eyes sparkle. "I am afraid that he is not cured yet," thought the chevalier, and he felt more than ever satisfied with the prudent resolution he had taken.

"I cannot tell you, sir," now exclaimed the young man, "how grateful I am for what you have done for me, nor do I know how to repay such a service. Last night you saved my life, and now you have saved my honour."

"And I rely upon your preserving it pure," rejoined Cambremer gravely; "but it is time to start. Where does the banker live?"

"On the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle."

"All right. Then we will get a cab on the Place Saint Sulpice, and we shall be at his office in half an hour."

Paul Vernier made no objection, and the two new friends went out together and walked arm in arm down the Rue Férou. The young man's face showed traces of the emotion he had experienced on the night before, but the chevalier did not appear to be fatigued, and in fact on the way it

was he who did all the talking. At last the cab they had taken stopped in front of a large and handsome house on the Boulevard, almost facing the Gynmnase Theatre. Paul Vernier silently led his protector through a long court, and went up a winding staircase which was somewhat dark. "This is the place," said he, stopping at last on the first floor, in front of a door upon which there was a brass plate bearing the words :

K. BOUSENNA & Co.
COLLECTORS & DISCOUNTERS.

The entrance was by no means imposing, and Cambremer had a vague suspicion that Monsieur Bousenna's banking operations might be connected with something approaching usury. However, Paul loudly rang the bell, a heavy tread was heard inside, and finally, on the door being set ajar, a glimpse was obtained of a man wrapped up in a figured dressing-gown. "Aha ! it is you, is it ?" said this person in a rough voice.

The chevalier, somewhat surprised to see a banker personally open the door to his visitors, thought it necessary to speak in order to save the young man the embarrassment of introducing him.

"I am a friend, sir," said he, "of Monsieur Paul Vernier's family, and I came with him this morning to speak to you about an urgent matter."

M. Bousenna gave his unknown visitor a malicious look, and after a moment's hesitation he decided to admit him. "An urgent matter," he growled. "Very well ! I can guess what it is. Come in !"

This curt invitation was followed by a kind of sneer which gave Cambremer abundant food for reflection. "One would think that he knew that the lad had lost the money, and thought that I had come here to intercede for him," he said to himself, as he followed the banker to his private office.

As soon as they had entered this sanctuary, which was but dimly lighted by a single window, Francis began inquisitively examining the man before him. He was very tall and powerfully built, and although his broad face and smoothly shaven chin gave him at the first glance a mild aspect, this was contradicted by the brilliancy of his eyes and the harshness of his mouth.

"Where are the ten thousand francs which I sent you to collect yesterday ?" he roughly said to Paul. He undoubtedly did not see the notion made by the young fellow, who, instead of replying, was fumbling for his pocket-book, for he added, in a threatening tone : "I warn you that I sha'n't accept any excuse or any guarantee. The money, or a policeman !"

"Here are the ten thousand francs, sir," now replied Paul Vernier, while the chevalier, indignant at the banker's ferocious outburst, felt strongly inclined to take him by the throat. M. Bousenna made a sudden start as he caught sight of the bank-notes. He took them, however, counted them carefully, and then placed them in a drawer of his desk.

While he was doing so he looked suspiciously at Cambremer. "To what do I owe the honour of your visit, sir ?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"I will be brief, sir," replied the chevalier, "for I am in a hurry. This is what has brought me here. I am going to start on a journey which will last a month or so, and I don't care to take a considerable sum of money with me. My young friend, who has the good fortune to be your secretary, told me, however, that you would perhaps consent to take my funds on deposit till my return."

"I can do so, sir," replied the banker, with such a display of indifference that it seemed to Cambremer very much like acting.

"Very good, then ! I will return this afternoon and pay it in," said Francis, going towards the door.

"Before four, if you please," said M. Bousenna, with a smile which greatly resembled a grimace, and which enabled him to display a fine set of teeth, as white as ivory.

"Very well. It's agreed. Good-day, my dear Paul ; come to see me !"

Having thus bade his young friend farewell, the chevalier went down the stairs four at a time. He was easy in mind as to the young gambler, since he had seen him pay back the money, but the banker's strange face perplexed him very much. "Where have I seen those eyes before?" he muttered, as he got into the cab which had been waiting for him at the door of the house.

III.

IN WHICH TWO SPECIALISTS HAVE A CHAT TOGETHER.

"THEN, my dear doctor, you don't think that there has been a crime on this occasion?"

"No."

"The death was very strange, however, and the circumstances that preceded and followed it are of a nature to put the authorities upon the alert."

"Circumstances, my dear commissary, have nothing to do with anatomy, and they don't concern me. Beyond stating the results of the necropsy I have no further evidence to give."

This dialogue took place in a private office, the walls of which were covered with green paper, and between two grave-looking individuals who, in different ways, were mixed up with the drama of the box at the Odéon. Equally old, equally solemn, and, above all, equally *blasés* as regards catastrophes, these white-tied personages were coldly talking over the affair of the night before.

The legal official, at whose office the conference was being held, looked more especially at the judicial aspect of the affair, and was deliberating as to his right course. Must he hand the matter over to an investigating magistrate, or simply enter it as an accident? Such was the subject of this conscientious official's meditations.

On the other hand, the doctor looked at the matter from a scientific point of view. Firmly convinced that death ought to yield its secrets to a practitioner as experienced as himself, he was greatly surprised that he should this time have failed to find out the cause of so sudden a demise ; and as the examination of the poor woman's body had revealed nothing positive to him, he unhesitatingly concluded that the death had been a natural one.

"Then you are absolutely certain, doctor?" insisted the tenacious commissary.

"That two and two make four ; that in any case where violence or poison is used some external or internal injury follows, and that the organs which I have examined are as healthy as your own."

"As mine?" muttered the commissary. "Well, I have a gastric affection which gives me a great deal of trouble, but never mind my

stomach just now. I must send in the report to-night. Will you sign it?"

"Of course, I will, with both hands! I never made a more conclusive necropsy than this one." So saying the doctor took the paper held out to him by the commissary and looked round to find a pen.

"And see how careful and complete it is," resumed the doctor, who was fond of complimenting himself. "Just listen to this passage: 'There is no sign of any lesion in the thoracic members, for it is impossible to consider as such a very slight erosion on the skin above the scapulo-humeral articulation, and which, to all appearance, has been produced by a scratch with a pin.'"

The commissary gravely listened to this perusal, and gave a nod of approbation.

"Just find me a doctor among your new-fangled practitioners capable of drawing up such a report as that!" said the physician, triumphantly.

"Yes, yes, I don't think that the examination will go any further, although, between ourselves, the sudden disappearance of the unfortunate woman's husband is altogether inexplicable."

"How do you know that the man who was with her was her husband?" rejoined the sceptical doctor, with a sarcastic smile.

"That's true!"

"The woman is evidently a foreigner. That opaque complexion of hers, and her hair as black as the raven's wing, are only to be found among certain Oriental or Southern races. Her amiable escort probably brought her from Spain or India, and deserted her in the midst of the performance in order to start upon fresh conquests in Paris itself."

"Perhaps so; but this sudden death—"

"Is a mere coincidence, my dear sir."

"Observe that your supposition falls to the ground, for the only witness whom we have been able to question—the box-opener who had charge of that very box—declared that the woman had a little girl with her, a little girl whom the man took away with him."

"That is an indication which will make the inquiry more easy. For you will investigate the matter, of course."

"No, doctor, for in my report I conclude, as you do, that the death was a natural one, and I see no reason why the police should take up the matter."

"Bah! the body will be recognized. But, now I think of it, have you summoned that crazy kind of fellow who first went into the box? He seemed to know these people, and he almost upset me when he rushed off after the man and the little girl."

"Indeed! I had not thought of that, but there is still time, for I presume that the fellow you speak of was that Casse-Cou who was brought to me for having jumped from the gallery into the pit. My former clerk, Cou rapied, knows his name and address, and I will have him summoned, but I very much doubt whether I shall learn anything of importance from him."

"Who knows? You might always try. As a doctor, there is nothing more for me to do; but as a man I am somewhat interested in this affair," said the physician, playing with a gold snuff-box which one of his rich patients had presented to him.

The two auxiliaries of the law had reached this point in their remarks when an office attendant came to inform the commissary that a gentleman named Cambremer wished to speak to him about an urgent matter.

"Cambremer!" repeated the official; "it seems to me that this is the very madman we were just talking of."

"Let him come in, then, my dear sir," urged the doctor; "it may be amusing."

The magistrate gave the necessary instructions to his clerk, and a moment later the chevalier entered in his usual way, that is to say rather more abruptly than is suitable for a person who has come to make a request, or even to give evidence. He had called, however, in both capacities, and he had already had ample time to prepare himself for a hearing, as this was the second day which had followed upon the drama. The first day had been devoted to other matters, as it happened to be a Sunday.

"Aha! young man, it is you, is it?" said the commissary; "have you any information to give us about the fair lady in the private box?"

"I came to ask some information of you, sir," replied Cambremer, whom this easy tone exasperated. The excited chevalier could not understand how it was that routine hardened the hearts of the most feeling magistrates.

"To ask me for information?—and by what right, may I ask?"

This question somewhat embarrassed Francis; but he felt strong in his enthusiasm for the cause of the unfortunate. "Well, sir," said he, making every effort to contain himself, "I have taken charge of the child of the poor woman who fell a victim to an atrocious crime, and it is in that child's name that I have come here to inquire what course the authorities have taken."

"An atrocious crime! Why, how you talk!" said the doctor, who held on to his own opinions.

"A child!" repeated the commissary. "What child?"

"A little girl of ten whom the murderer deserted in the street, and to whom I have given shelter!"

"The deuce you have! but that is against the law. Vagrants found on the public highway must be taken, according to the terms of Clause 5 of the law of—"

"Ah, sir, if out of respect to the law I had refrained from taking the poor waif home, she would now be dead of cold and hunger."

However severe he might be as a formalist, the commissary could not but admit the justice of this argument.

"Well then," said he, sagaciously, to the chevalier, "the child must have told you all about her parents, and I am quite ready to utilize the information she has given you to clear up this little mystery."

"The child told me nothing and could tell me nothing."

"Is she dumb, then?"

"No, but she speaks a language which no one can understand."

The physician laughed and said, with a self-satisfied air: "I am afraid, sir, that your friends and you are not very well grounded in foreign tongues, and a better educated man might perhaps—"

"I should be delighted if you were the man in question," replied Cambremer, drily, "but, in the meantime, I beg the commissary to take my deposition, and I hope that he will actively search for the murderer and his accomplice, for he had one, I am sure of it."

"As to listening to your testimony, sir, I am quite ready to do that," replied the commissary, "but as to taking judicial measures, there must at least be some sort of proof."

"Proof! there is plenty of proof! The giant who has disappeared, and

the young man with the red camellia who was making signs from the stage-box."

It was as well that Cambremer did not turn round, for he would have seen the doctor tap his forehead, a gesture which in every country in the world means that the person indicated is crazy.

"I won't deny that the event which interrupted the performance at the Odéon was a strange one," now said the commissary, "but science has spoken and declares that the affair was a mere accident."

"Science is that gentleman, I suppose," said the chevalier, looking with a sarcastic expression at the doctor, who flushed with anger on hearing this satirical remark.

The commissary nodded. He had, in point of fact, some doubts as to the doctor's infallibility, and was not sorry to see him involved in a dispute with Cambremer. However, the latter was satisfied at having thus manifested his contempt, and without troubling himself any further about the irascible doctor he resumed: "I only ask one thing for the present, and that is, that you yourself examine the child who alone can reveal to us the truth about this horrible adventure."

"Oh, as to that, I am quite willing, and whenever you bring her—"

"She is there," said the chevalier, turning toward the door of the room which preceded the commissary's private office.

"What! have you brought her with you? That was a very good idea of yours, and I will question her immediately."

"We shall be very unlucky," remarked the doctor, "if between us two we don't succeed in ascertaining something from her."

Cambremer shrugged his shoulders and rose to open the door. "Come in, madame, if you please," said he, politely.

At this request, Madame Mongis entered the office leading the little girl by the hand. Their entrance occasioned what is called a "prolonged sensation" in parliamentary debates, both the officials being taken aback with surprise. The grave and highly respectable appearance of Madame Mongis and the marvellous beauty of the child filled the magistrate, especially, with astonishment; he had no doubt expected to see some common-place child.

The little girl was attired from head to foot in mourning, for the chevalier's compassionate neighbours had spent an entire day and night in making her an orphan's black suit. Her simple dress and its dark colour set off her lustrous eyes and regular features. However, her childish face now wore an expression of the deepest sadness. It was easy to see that she understood why she no longer wore the elegant attire in which she had been arrayed at the theatre. Still, she showed no fear or surprise in the presence of the two strangers, whose serious faces were certainly calculated to awe her.

"Madame Mongis," said Cambremer, with a bow as he introduced his neighbour, "the widow of a captain of the royal guard and a neighbour of mine, who has been kind enough to take charge of this poor little girl."

The commissary bowed politely and offered his lady visitor a chair, in which she seated herself with the ease of a woman accustomed to move in good society. The child stepped close to her, as though she feared being taken away from her protectress.

"She is really wonderfully beautiful," said the astonished commissary, in a low tone.

"It is the Georgian type, the purest of the Caucasian race," added the doctor.

"Her intelligence is as remarkable as her beauty," now remarked Madame Mongis; "she does not know a word of our language, but we already understand one another."

"By signs?" asked the physician.

"By our eyes more especially; there are moments when her eyes speak."

"But you have not been able to learn anything from her, have you?" inquired the commissary.

"Not yet, but I am sure that I shall succeed in doing so. She has made me understand that her name is Baïa."

"That isn't a name," said the doctor.

"It is her name. Look there!"

Indeed the child had looked up, she evidently understood that she was the subject of the conversation.

"But Baïa," urged the doctor, "is a celebrated place in the Bay of Naples, between Puzzoli and Cape Misena. That may be the place where she was born."

"I don't think so," rejoined Madame Mongis, smiling at this display of geographical knowledge. "If she came from Naples she would speak Italian."

"True," remarked the commissary.

"The general character of her face," now remarked the man of learning, "seems to me to betoken an Oriental origin. Come, let me see, we have Hungary where the race is superb. Latin is spoken there, and I will try a little of Cicero's tongue: "*Loquerisne linguam latinum?*" he asked, taking the little girl's hand in his own.

The attempt was not successful however, for she drew nearer to Madame Mongis, and only replied by a look of surprise.

"Well, then," continued the doctor, without being at all disconcerted, "we must try Wallachian, Turkish, Armenian, Persian, and—"

"We shall have a great deal of trouble in finding interpreters for all those tongues in Paris," interrupted the commissary, "and I think that we had better wait till the girl learns French."

"I don't think that it will take long for her to do so," rejoined Madame Mongis.

"Well, for the present, madame, be kind enough to tell me what you noticed in the child. Had she nothing about her that might help to trace her identity, no locket, necklace, or jewel of any kind?"

"Nothing, sir; her attire was that of the child of well-to-do parents; she wore a pink silk dress and ribbons of the same colour in her hair, and some very fine linen."

"Did her clothes seem to you to have been made in Paris?" asked the sagacious commissary.

"No, sir. The cut isn't at all fashionable for here, and so far as I can tell the silk isn't of Lyons make."

"Your remarks are valuable, madame, and they entirely agree with those which I made as to the clothing of the poor woman who died so suddenly in the box at the theatre. I couldn't find any paper or indication of any kind upon her person, and she was dressed like a foreigner."

"I may add, sir, that Baïa is not at all acquainted with Paris and that she can only have been here a very short time; for, with the intelligence

which her face shows, she would otherwise be able to take me to the house where her mother lived."

"Certainly."

"It seems to me certain, besides, that the man who took her away from the theatre deserted her purposely, for otherwise he would have had time to make inquiries of the police in order to find her again, and you would have heard of it."

"All that is very plausible," opined the commissary, who fully appreciated the justice of Madame Mongis's reasoning.

"Well, sir," asked Cambremer, after a moment's silence, "do you still doubt what I advanced?"

"I have no doubt but what a serious wrong has been done; the abandoning of a child is an offence against the law, but between that and the murder which you talk about there is a long way indeed."

The Chevalier Casse-Cou was no lawyer, and the subtle distinctions of the law annoyed him. He controlled himself, however, and merely asked a simple question. "Under these circumstances, sir," he quietly said, "will you allow me to inquire what you intend to do?"

"Why, the affair will follow its natural course," replied the functionary. "If the victim of this sad accident is not identified—"

"Identified! how could that be?"

"Why not? according to rule, the body must be exhibited for identification during seventy-two hours; twenty-four have elapsed since yesterday at noon; there are forty-eight more to follow."

"Excuse me, sir; I don't understand, sir," said Cambremer; "how and where would this take place?"

"At the Morgue, young man—an excellent method which reconciles the regard due to misfortune with the necessities of the law."

The chevalier was suffocating and could hardly keep his seat. It was a rough blow to his enthusiastic heart to fall from the height of his dream of revenge to the sorry realism of police regulations. "The Morgue!" he repeated, in a hoarse voice, "that body exhibited at the Morgue! Is that all you can do to find the murderers of the mother and the persecutors of the child?"

"Come, come, sir," said the commissary, who in the exercise of his formidable functions had not yet become insensible to sincere grief. "I beg of you to believe that I would not have alluded to this painful necessity had the little girl been able to understand what we are saying; but in her own interest, and to arrive at the truth, I do not see any other course that can be followed."

"It is the best," put in the doctor, who considered himself called upon to give his views, "and in 1828 I saw a very curious instance of the recognition of a body which was on exhibition. I was then at the Hôtel Dieu and—"

"Excuse me, gentlemen," interrupted Madame Mongis, who was not at all interested in the doctor's retrospective anecdotes, "I have a request to make of you."

The commissary made a sign of encouragement. "What is it, pray?" said he.

"I wish to ask you to leave the poor little orphan with me. She will be happier with me than in an asylum, for I look upon her as my second daughter."

"The proposal does you honour, madame, and I will consent to it with

all my heart, provided you will promise to attend with the child before the authorities at any time, and can prove that you have sufficient resources to—”

“I have a pension, as an officer’s widow,” said Madame Mongis, blushing, “and I can earn enough by embroidering to suffice for—”

“Besides, I still have sixty thousand francs at the Bank of France,” interrupted Cambremer, “and I will guarantee that the child will be properly cared for.”

“This is more than is necessary,” rejoined the commissary, smiling at the remembrance of the interrogatory during which the chevalier had declared that he had no houses, lands, money, or any resources whatever.

“And don’t forget the Semitic tongues,” remarked the learned doctor; “you will find what you need at the School of Languages, at the College of France, and at the Royal Library. They even teach Mandchou-Tartar there.”

“For my own part I should have more confidence in this lady’s own teaching,” remarked the commissary.

“I hope, sir,” now said Cambremer, who had some trouble in concealing his emotion, “that you won’t refuse what I have to ask of in my own name.”

“If it is nothing contrary to law, you may be sure that—”

“Well, in the first place I wish to pay for the funeral of the victim.”

“There will be no objection to that if she is not identified, and on the day after to-morrow at this hour, you can remove the body.”

“I thank you, and now I beg of you to authorise me to follow up the murderers myself.”

“My dear sir,” said the official, after a moment’s thought, “you greatly perplex me; the interference of private individuals in an affair of a criminal nature is contrary to all principles and rules, and it does not rest with me to allow you to—”

“That may be. But then the authorities will take the matter up, won’t they?”

“Well—no. The report is there, and it declares that the death was due to natural causes. All that I could promise would be to take no notice of what you might do.”

“That is all I ask,” replied the chevalier, abruptly rising to his feet. “I will act alone, and I swear before Heaven that the dead woman shall be avenged.”

IV.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT GHOSTS MAY BE SEEN IN CEMETERIES.

Two days after the chevalier had sworn that oath which he was fully determined to keep—it was a cold and dark winter morning—a plain and modest funeral procession stopped in front of the church of Saint Sulpice. Behind the humble hearse walked Francis Cambremer with his head bare; he was leaning upon the arm of his faithful squire, Courapiéd.

The mournful procession on its way from the Morgue to the church, had only met with the ordinary notice from the passers-by, the busy crowd giving but a careless glance at the poorly attended funeral. The men in

black performed their accustomed task with the methodical indifference usual in undertakers' assistants, and the body was carried into the nave. The religious preparations contrasted with the simplicity of the funeral procession, for the walls of the building were hung with black, and the high altar had been prepared for a solemn service. It was to Heaven that Cambremer had offered the only pomp attending this quiet interment.

Near the catafalque Madame Mongis and her daughter Martha were kneeling in prayer. The chevalier looked at them mournfully, and was greatly moved on seeing the dead woman's child seated between her two protectresses. She was looking with astonishment at the funereal scene, and it was easy to see that she did not understand what was going on around her. Madame Mongis had lacked the courage to try and explain the truth to her, but she had not ventured to keep her away from the cemetery. "Her mother looks down upon her from above," thought the pious woman, and this belief softened her grief.

Paul Vernier came in just as the funeral service began. Cambremer had written to him on the day before asking him to come to Saint Sulpice, and the young man had hastened to obey his benefactor, though he had had some difficulty in obtaining leave of absence from M. Bousenna. As yet he had little or no knowledge of the tragical affair at the Odéon. The chevalier had not had time to tell him about it; but he meant that same day to acquaint him with his plans and enlist him in the enterprise which he meditated.

On reaching the church, Paul silently pressed Cambremer's hand and placed himself behind him. The presence of Martha, whom he immediately recognised, soon engrossed all his attention, but he vainly endeavoured to catch the young girl's eye. Mademoiselle Mongis, with her forehead resting on her hands, was absorbed in the fervent prayers which she was offering to Heaven for Baïa, her dear little sister. The organ diffused grave harmony through the vast pile, and the mournful chants of the Catholic burial service arose at intervals from the depths of the dark nave. When the terrible *Dies Iræ* burst forth like a funeral knell, the few who were present bent beneath that thought of eternity which makes the strongest bow down, and the proudest humble themselves.

A woman who was leaning against a pillar was the only person present who retained a haughty and disdainful attitude. There was an air of audacity about her looks; and to any one who thus beheld her, with her slender and erect figure thus drawn upright among the kneeling, it might have seemed that she was defying death. A very thick black veil hid her face, but she seemed to be young, and her attire, although simple, was not inelegant. Cambremer was struck by this strange apparition, and a feeling of lively curiosity crept in amid the emotion which filled his heart. He had for some time been living among such singular occurrences that his imagination was now more than ever easily excited. However, he could not carry his observations very far, for, either because she felt tired of the sad ceremonial, or realised that she was attracting attention, the strange woman turned away from the pillar and disappeared amid the shadows of the transept.

The funeral service was almost at an end, and those present had now only to accomplish the last rites. The chevalier slowly left his place and sprinkled holy water upon the coffin. His eyes were dry, but the effort he made to control his emotion was so great that his features were almost convulsed. He passed on, and waited near the door till the sad cere-

mony was ended. The faithful Cassonade stationed himself at his master's side. He was weeping without attempting to conceal it. Paul naturally felt less emotion, for he had never seen the dead woman, and he was only interested in the sorrow of his friend the chevalier; still he experienced that deep impression which the sight of an eternal farewell always produces.

It was now the turn of the women. Martha went through with the sad duty, stifling her sobs in her handkerchief; while Madame Mongis hesitated a moment before taking the little girl up to the bier. The funereal sight might frighten the child, and she was afraid that her nervous delicate organization might receive a severe shock. But Baïa went calmly and quietly on, and "blessed" the body without showing any emotion. It was evident that she did not know the significance of her act, and performed it quite mechanically.

Cambremer, who was watching her attentively, saw in this strange ignorance a fresh proof of the accuracy of his conjectures. At the age of ten all children know what a funeral is, and this one must have lived in a state of absolute isolation to be unaware of the nature of such a ceremony as this. And yet the chevalier remembered that when Baïa had been dressed in black a few days before, she had wept. It seemed, therefore, that she had previously worn mourning, but had never attended a funeral mass. In this contradiction there was a clue which Cambremer decided he would turn to account; but the time had now come to leave the church. The bearers took up the coffin, and the beggars, crouching under the porch, looked with astonishment at this funeral, at which a pauper's hearse waited in front of a church hung as richly as for the costliest interments.

Madame Mongis and her daughter led the child towards the Virgin's chapel, where they wished to offer up a last prayer. The three men followed the hearse on foot. Cambremer walked along bare-headed, although the cold was somewhat sharp, and his face expressed so much grief that the passers-by looked at him with compassionate surprise.

They took the road to the Mont-Parnasse cemetery, and the distance was a somewhat long one from the Place Saint Sulpice. Paul and Cassonade walked on side by side, two paces behind the chevalier, and each reflected upon widely different subjects. The young man was beginning to feel great interest in Mademoiselle Martha Mongis, whose face was continually before his eyes. She had even driven away the burning recollections of the gaming-table, and since that terrible night at Frascati's rooms comparative calmness had returned to his heart, so preyed upon previously by a passion for gambling. Paul already espied a prospect of a new life, far from the mournful office where he passed his days in adding up figures—a life far from the temptations to which his proximity to a safe full of money exposed him. Instead of the stern and repugnant authority of M. Bousenna he thought of the indulgent control of the generous friend who had saved his honour and his life. He had an entirely false idea of Cambremer's wealth and influence, for he believed him to be a rich and powerful personage, and hoped to make progress in his good graces.

Cassonade, on his side, had less lofty and less sentimental projects. He had just burnt his ships by inducing his wife to agree to the chevalier's proposals. However, at the moment of definitely giving up his grocery business to follow the fortunes of a master whose adventurous nature he knew, the prudent Cassonade still hesitated. A fierce struggle was going on in his brain between the sound common sense with which nature had en-

dowed him, and the strong inclination which tempted him to follow Francis Cambremer. The coffin which he was following reminded him that, at the outset of his functions as "squire," he, the peaceable husband of Pétronille, would be mixed up in a dark and doubtful story. The future seemed to him to be full of policemen and bearded giants, and he somewhat regretted the innocent delights of a shopkeeping life at the moment when the procession reached the gate of the cemetery.

The chevalier had purchased a piece of ground, for he wished to erect a simple tomb over the victim's remains. The grave opened amid numerous crosses, railings and funeral chapels forming a perfect labyrinth, and the mourners passed along a narrow avenue of cypress trees to reach it. The weather looked rainy, and the cemetery had but few visitors that sad morning. Here and there some mother in mourning could be seen arranging some faded wreaths over a grave, or there was a gardener trimming the luxuriant growths which spring above neglected sepulchres.

The last act of the drama of death was a short one. This was but a low-class funeral, and the undertaker's men were anxious to have it over. The three mourners placed themselves round the open grave, the coffin slid along the ropes with that lugubrious rustle which seems like an echo from another world, and the grave-digger then handed his spade to Cambremer. The chevalier had nerved himself against any sign of weakness; he silently threw the first spadeful of earth upon the coffin, and crossed his arms while Paul did the same in his turn.

The ground was sloping, and at a few paces from the grave a massive monument o'ertopped this corner of the cemetery. Leaning upon the iron railing which surrounded it, a woman was attentively looking at the scene. The chevalier's back was turned towards her so that he could not see her, but his young friend, who had stepped back after handing the spade to Courapié, happened to face the mass of granite. He did not at first notice the presence of the strange woman, whom the sound of the gravel falling upon the coffin had doubtless attracted, and he walked a few steps up the slope without raising his head.

"Farewell!" said Cambremer in a hoarse voice. "Farewell, poor victim! Your child shall be protected, and your murderers shall be punished."

Just as the chevalier spoke these words, Paul Vernier, to his great surprise, heard a faint laugh, and he looked up. The woman was there, with her head erect, her lips parted and her eyes glaring, but she quickly drew back, and disappeared behind the gravestones, not however before Paul had caught sight of her face. He could not restrain an exclamation of surprise, and the chevalier turned round. But the young man either wished to keep the secret of this apparition to himself, or else he feared to fail in respect for the dead by making a confidential communication near an open grave, at all events he said nothing. Cambremer also kept silent, but he looked at his young friend as if striving to penetrate his most secret thoughts.

"Let us go," said he, after throwing the grave-digger the fee which the fellow asked for with the effrontery usual among his class.

The three men crossed the cemetery without exchanging a word. They were deeply moved by the scenes of the day, and seemed to be afraid to speak of them to each other. Paul's thoughts had for a moment changed their course, and as he went along the cypress-shaded avenues he looked both to right and left with evident anxiety. He was no doubt trying to catch sight of the woman who had so suddenly disappeared, but the place seemed

deserted, for he did not even espy a distant shadow amid the far-stretching wilderness of tombstones. The chevalier on his side seemed anxious to get away from the cemetery, and his face had resumed its habitual look of lofty resolution. After weeping over the grave of the victim he had become himself once more, and now he only thought of avenging her.

As he passed the office of the warden of the cemetery, the keeper of a marble yard came to propose to him some new and cheap gravestones, but he was sufficiently self-possessed to avoid any outburst of anger. He had made up his mind in the morning to endure all the odious formalities which attend a burial in Paris. He had been obliged to declare that no tie of relationship bound him to the deceased, who had been entered upon the register of the Morgue in these words: "An unknown woman. Age between twenty-five and twenty-six. Description, etc., etc." However, Cambremer had resigned himself to everything, even to formalities of this kind.

As soon as the three mourners again found themselves on the Boulevard Mont-Parnasse, Paul Vernier expressed a wish to leave his companions. "Monsieur Bousenna told me that I must be back before two o'clock," said he, "and I have only just time enough to reach the office."

As he gave this excuse for going away, he held out his hand to the chevalier, but the latter was in no haste to take it.

"Excuse me, my dear Paul," he said, after a moment's pause, "if I ask you a question instead of thanking you for having come; but for the last three days I have been mixed up in such strange events, and I foresee so unequal a struggle, that I need the confidence of my friends as well as their friendship."

The young man fully understood the meaning of this preamble; but he waited for a more direct attack before replying.

"I have not yet explained to you the task I wish to accomplish," continued the chevalier, "but as I believe in your good sense and courage, I mean to ask for your help."

"Oh, sir, I am yours, body and soul!" exclaimed Paul. "Tell me what you want me to do, and you may be sure—"

"Oh! I know that you are possessed of feeling, but the time hasn't yet come for me to ask you to share the dangers which I shall incur. To-morrow, perhaps, I shall ask an important service of you; to-day, I merely want you to give me a frank reply."

"I could not deceive the man who saved me."

"Well, then, tell me who or what was it that you saw just now near the grave?"

"A woman who was looking at the funeral from a distance," replied Paul, without the slightest hesitation.

"You know this woman, do you not?"

"I know her, or at least I thought I recognised her, although her presence in the cemetery seemed inexplicable."

Cambremer listened with the utmost attention, and his feelings were legible on his face. "Excuse my insistence, my dear Paul," said he in a lower tone; "of course your secrets as a young man don't concern me, but I should be very grateful if you would tell me where you previously saw this woman?"

The youngster blushed, hesitated, but ended by replying: "At Frascati's."

The chevalier turned very pale, took his young friend by the arm, and

drew him aside, away from the shanties where some vendors of wreaths and *immortelles* were offering them to the passers-by. "At Frascati's, you say? On what day? What was she doing there?" he asked.

These questions followed so swiftly one upon another that Paul lost his self-possession. "It was a long time ago that I—that I saw her for the first time," stammered the young fellow, "and there is quite a story about it."

"Speak, tell me about it!"

"It relates to the—the matter in which you so generously intervened."

"She was there then—she went to Frascati's on the night when you lost that money?"

"That night," replied the young man, lowering his eyes like a culprit who is compelled to make a painful confession, "I only caught a glimpse of her. She paused for a moment near the table where I was playing. I had a pile of gold before me. She looked at me with the same black eyes which I saw sparkling just now in the cemetery, and then she went on. I lost my head, and then I began to lose, for I have never been able to bear the gaze of those brilliant eyes of hers—as cold as steel."

"What is she like? What kind of figure and face has she?"

"She is tall, pale, and beautiful, but in a peculiar style. She terrifies one rather than charms, and yet—"

"Unhappy boy! you love her, then?"

Paul seemed to feel acute anguish. He trembled, and his teeth chattered. He seemed like a child trying to relate some horrible dream. "No," he muttered at last, "it isn't love that I feel for her; I rather feel afraid of her; perhaps it is hatred that I feel, for she has weighed upon my life like an evil genius."

Cambremer took his hand, and pressed it affectionately in his own. "Paul, I am your friend, tell me all," he said.

These words opened the young man's heart; he perhaps recalled Martha's sweet face to enable him to rid himself of the phantom which pursued him, and he spoke. The chevalier had seated himself beside him on a bench in the lonely avenue which leads from the cemetery to the Observatoire, and Cassonade practised his apprenticeship as squire by remaining at a discreet distance from his master.

"You know, sir," began Paul, "that my mother sent me to Paris last year, and that I was engaged, on my arrival, at Monsieur Bousenna's office?"

Cambremer, who remembered his young friend's first confidences perfectly well, made an affirmative sign.

"Well, the first months of my stay were very sad. I had no taste for figures, but I feared I might distress my mother, and I passed my days at the office and my nights at work in my room. My only amusement was an occasional walk on the Boulevard before climbing to the fifth floor on which I lived."

"You were happy, then!" sighed the chevalier.

"Monsieur Bousenna," continued Paul, "treated me harshly, and never spoke to me except to ask about the position of my family, whose interests he had looked after before my father's ruin. One day, just as I was about to leave his office, after having finished the correspondence, he handed me six thousand-franc notes, telling me to take them on the following morning, at an early hour, to the house of one of his customers. This was the first time that he had given me a commission of the kind; his confidence surprised and flattered me."

"I can guess what happened, alas," said Cambremer.

"You do not guess all; you think, perhaps, that I yielded at once to temptation. No, my mother, my dear mother, had given me such a horror of gambling that I was far from dreaming of turning the money to a bad use. I was scarcely aware that there existed in Paris hells where a man might ruin himself in less than an hour's time. I put the bank-notes in my pocket-book, and went out with the intention of going home. It was at the end of the autumn, and it was raining, and the streets were almost deserted. At the moment when I was turning the corner of one of the side-streets near the Gymnase, I felt a hand laid upon my arm, and an agitated voice whispered in my ear: 'They are following me to kill me. Not a word or I am lost!' I turned, and saw a woman whose face was pale, but who was strikingly beautiful—"

"It was she!"

"Yes, and to my misfortune I had not the courage to repulse her, as though she had been some venomous reptile. She rapidly dragged me along, and I spare you the falsehoods which she told me as we darted on over the slippery pavement. I was but nineteen; I felt her breath upon my cheek, and my heart beat as though it would burst. When we reached the Boulevard Montmartre, I was intoxicated, as it were; it seemed to me that my thoughts, my honour, and my life, belonged to this woman."

"Yes, the charm of Cierce!" muttered Cambremer.

"Let us go in here," said she; "I can escape him by mingling with the throng."

She led me through a garden and up a staircase, and then I suddenly found myself in a room brilliant with light and gilding. A warm, heavy atmosphere seemed to weigh upon my brain, the chandeliers sparkled, and gold clinked with a tempting sound. I had a kind of vertigo. How can I tell you? She led me to a table and bade me play, and I had not even a thought that I was about to commit a crime. The passion of gambling was latent in my veins, and suddenly it broke forth like a burning fever. I threw a bank-note upon the table—"

"And you lost all?"

"No," replied Paul, gloomily; "fatality made me win; if I had lost that night, I should probably have been cured; but I took away with me thirty thousand francs, and I had promised to see the worthless creature on the morrow. She had left me on some absurd pretext when she saw that I had my hands full of gold. It seemed as though my good luck at play had disappointed her calculations."

"That is strange," said the chevalier, thoughtfully.

"On the morrow I went to carry the six thousand francs to my employer's customer, and I handed the receipt to Monsieur Bousenna, who examined it very attentively. But I had tasted of the intoxicating cup, and was lost. I returned that night to Frascati's; I played, I won once more. I learned the slang of the gambling-room and its customs; then I began to lose; I went home with rage in my heart, swearing to myself that I would never again plunge into that gulf, and yet I returned there. On the day when Monsieur Bousenna confided to me a larger amount than before, I had—only the evening previously—left the last louis of my winnings on the table."

"And the woman?" asked Cambremer.

"The woman? She did not speak to me again, and I did not run after her. But she returned every evening, and seemed to feel a cruel pleasure

when the croupier's rake came down upon my money. It seems to me that I can still see her standing there, with a red flower in her hand."

"Ah ! I expected that !" exclaimed the chevalier.

V.

HOW THE CHEVALIER MADE UP HIS MIND TO ASK ADVICE.

It was the evening of the mournful day upon which Cambremer had conducted the funeral of the unknown woman who had so strangely expired at the Odéon. Under a smoky lamp, swinging twenty feet above the pavement, and at the entry of a narrow, dirty street, the chevalier was standing in company with his faithful Cassonade.

The new made "squire," had assumed attire better suited to his new avocation. Instead of the fur cap, the usual head gear of a Paris grocer in those days, he wore a high hat which gave him a majestic air, and his stout figure was arrayed in a coat with a triple cape. Cambremer was dressed as usual and he evinced an impatience which his friend did not seem to share.

"How is it that this man never sees any one before nine o'clock ?" he asked abruptly.

"Between ourselves," replied Cassonade, with an air of mystery, "I believe that he is engaged during the day-time at the Prefecture of Police."

"Are you sure that he is skilful ; and can be trusted ?"

"Oh ! he is a long-headed fellow, and works conscientiously, but he charges high."

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

"When I was going to marry Pétronille, most of her dowry consisted in a claim on a grocer at Montrouge, who had failed twice and who had been in hiding for six months. But in less than a fortnight, Monsieur Gévaudan found him and forced him to pay us ; however, it cost us a hundred crowns."

"I will give him a thousand if he will find the miserable murderer whom I am looking for."

"I have an idea that he will find a clue by what Monsieur Vernier told you."

"Yes ; the woman who came to look at us at the grave was evidently the one who was dressed in masculine attire at the Odéon, and she is undoubtedly the murderer's accomplice. There is a mysterious connection which I cannot understand, between the share which she had in that crime, and the persistency with which she has tried to ruin Paul."

"Monsieur Gévaudan will clear up the whole matter as easily as Pétronille would unwind a skein of silk. Besides, it seems to me that a woman who frequents Frascati's cannot be very hard to find."

"Harder, perhaps, than you think. She now knows that the young man is my friend, and that I undertook to bury the victim. So it is scarcely likely that she will return to the gambling-house, for she will realize that I shall look for her there."

"Bah ! people don't think of everything, and women of that kind can't reason very clearly. Ah ! there's the signal now, sir."

"What signal ?"

"The lamp in Monsieur Gévaudan's window, in the Rue de la Lune, No. 77, on the third floor. As soon as he is ready for visitors lie lights up."

"Then we can go up?"

"Yes, sixty-three steps, knock twice, and ask for Monsieur Joseph, that's the name he is known by."

The chevalier hesitated for a moment. These particulars in reference to the person whom he wished to consult were not inviting. But that was the time when private police agencies flourished under the patronage of the celebrated Vidocq, and Cambremer had made up his mind to try every possible means to attain his aim. Cassonade had been boasting to him ever since the morning about the talents of the legalized spy of the Rue de la Lune and he wished to find out all about him.

"Show me the way," said he, pushing his hat well down over his eyes, just as a soldier secures his helmet before charging at the enemy.

The stairs were narrow, steep, and dark, and they were reached by a passage where there was no prying doorkeeper to be seen. The three flights were soon left behind, for the chevalier went up four steps at a time, urging on his less agile squire.

"Here we are!" said Cassonade, out of breath after his rapid climb.

He twice pulled a bell rope to which a hare's foot was affixed, and then waited for the result of the repeated summons. The darkness around them was complete, and Cambremer was somewhat surprised at the profound silence pervading the building. Two or three minutes passed before any one gave a sign of life, but then a peephole suddenly opened in the upper part of the door, and a stream of light dazzled the visitors.

"What do you wish?" asked a hoarse voice.

The man who asked this question held a lamp with a tin reflector, which projected the light upon the landing.

"We want to see Monsieur Joseph," replied Cassonade.

After a moment's pause, which the man inside probably spent in examining his visitors, the noise of gliding bolts announced that he had made up his mind to admit them. "Come in, gentlemen," said he, opening the door which turned noiselessly on its well-oiled hinges.

Cambremer went in the first, and naturally tried to see the face of the private detective, but the reflector had been replaced by a shade, and in the dim light which now prevailed it was difficult to distinguish anything clearly.

"We have come to consult you," said Cassonade.

"Very well; please follow me," said M. Joseph, after locking the door and putting the key in his pocket.

These prudent measures being taken, he went ahead of his visitors and showed them into a good-sized room, in which there were six straw-seated chairs, a wooden table painted black, a number of green boxes placed in order upon shelves, each bearing various numbers and inscriptions. The private detective then offered his visitors two seats, and seated himself at the table upon which he had already set the lamp. So far as the chevalier could judge by the faint light, this dealer in information of a secret character was a tall old man, somewhat bent, but apparently still vigorous. He was poorly clad, in a long grey coat, something like a dressing gown, and he had a white beard trimmed in a point after the fashion prevalent among Polish Jews; whilst his pate—undoubtedly a bald one—was adorned with a red wig which came down over his eyes.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he asked in a moderately affable manner.

Cassonade thought that he had better speak the first, being an old customer. "Monsieur Gévaudan," said he, "I am the person who came to you last year about the affair of Rigoulard, who owed three thousand francs to my wife, Pétronille Courapié."

"True; I remember. Well?"

"Well," resumed the grocer, "I have now brought Monsieur Cambremer, my neighbour, to you, he has a somewhat complicated affair on hand."

"It is your turn now, sir," said the detective, turning to the chevalier. "Tell me your business clearly, and in as few words as possible. I have no time to lose."

This curt, dry way of speaking surprised Cambremer, who had expected to be treated to the lengthy circumlocution which most men of the law delight in. If M. Gévaudan had been trying to inspire confidence he could not have adopted better tactics. No one ever mistrusts a man who goes so promptly to the point.

Accordingly, the chevalier at once began to relate all that had occurred during the last few days. He omitted nothing, neither the finding of the little girl at the corner of the Rue Férou, nor his pursuit of the accomplice to Frascati's, nor her appearance that very day at the cemetery. The only point which he thought fit to leave in the shade was his unforeseen meeting with Paul Vernier. He thought it idle to bring a boy of twenty into so dark a mystery.

M. Gévaudan did not once interrupt the chevalier. He listened with his head bent, his eyes downcast, and his hands upon his knees. He seemed to be in a doze, but he soon showed Cambremer that he had not lost a syllable of what had been said. "Is that all?" he asked when the chevalier at length finished speaking.

"Yes, I don't think that I have omitted anything."

The old man resumed his meditative attitude. "What interest have you in this matter?" he suddenly asked.

"What interest!" repeated Cambremer, with surprise. He had a great mind to reply: "What is that to you?" but he needed the man's services, and so he restrained himself.

"I have no interest in it," he replied after a pause, "except that I want to protect an orphan, and punish some scoundrels as they deserve to be punished."

"Very well; you are acting as an outsider, then?"

"As an honest man," replied the chevalier.

"Oh! it all amounts to the same thing. You had never previously seen the woman who is dead until you saw her at the Odéon?"

"Never."

"And until now you have been unable to obtain any explanation from the little girl?"

"Yes."

M. Gévaudan drew from his pocket a note-book with a greasy cover; and began to write a few words in pencil. This went on for a minute or two and then the old man put his note-book carefully away, and, raising his head, inquired: "Are you rich?"

"No," replied Cambremer, somewhat surprised.

"Ah! so much the worse."

"If you mean that you must have some money to begin operations I can give you some."

"I require a thousand francs to begin with."

"Here is the amount," replied the chevalier, holding out a bank-note.

"I shall need more by-and-bye."

"Oh! if you succeed, I will reward you handsomely; and, as for the necessary funds for your investigations, I am ready to give them you."

"Very well," said M. Gévaudan, drily. "In three days at the latest, you will hear from me."

"What! do you expect that you will be able to unearth the murderer in so short a time?"

"Perhaps I may," replied the old man, in a mocking tone; "the birds of the air and the fishes in the sea are the only things that don't leave any trace of their passage."

And with this remark, he rose up so as to let his visitors understand that the audience was at an end.

VI.

WHICH SHOWS THE DISADVANTAGE OF PROOFS BEFORE LETTERING.

MADAME MONGIS's humble abode was situated on the second floor, directly above the rooms where Francis Cambremer lived. Prior to the fatal event at the Odéon there had been very little neighbourly intercourse in the house known as No. 22, Rue Férou. The chevalier was naturally retiring; Cassonade was busy selling his prunes and candles all day long, and the ladies embroidered or sewed. As for the other tenants, who were almost all of them clerks or counter-jumpers, they went out early, returned late, and were never to be seen.

The death of an unknown woman, and the finding of a little lost child had sufficed, however, to bring about a great change. The grocer's shop was no longer the favourite meeting-place of all the gossips in the neighbourhood, now that Cassonade had ceased to keep it. While waiting to find a successor, he had placed a cousin of his wife's there, and devoted himself entirely to Cambremer, who treated him more as a friend than as a servant. On their side the widow and her daughter neglected their embroidery to make a little outfit for their dear Baïa. But they had entered into much closer acquaintance with their neighbour on the first floor, and not a day elapsed without their meeting to talk over various projects concerning the future of the little orphan.

The good chevalier was very happy now that he led a less lonely life, and he much preferred sitting by Madame Mongis's fire, to remaining alone in his rooms. Cassonade presided over the refreshment department, and utilised the knowledge which he had acquired in business, in concocting various kinds of syrups. Paul Vernier had also been admitted into the little circle. The young fellow had shown himself very attentive; and his presence appeared to be acceptable to Madame Mongis, as well as to her daughter.

It was now nearly a week since the dead woman's remains had been consigned to the cemetery, and nothing had occurred to clear up the mystery of her tragical demise. This was not because Cambremer had lost any time, for he had paid three visits to the commissary, and had gone twice

to the Rue de la Lunc. But the commissary knew nothing more than on the day after the event, and on the occasion of Casse-Cou's third visit he had politely insinuated that his duties did not allow him time to take any further steps in the affair. As for worthy M. Gévaudan, Cambremer had only seen him through his peep-hole, and then he had merely said: "Nothing new as yet; I will write to you." With that the peep-hole had been closed with far from encouraging abruptness.

Thus Francis was beginning to despair of arriving at any result through this suspicious medium, and he was busy concocting other more or less practicable schemes. He somewhat consoled himself, however, by trying to bring his young friend Paul into the path of rectitude, and by following the rapid progress of the little girl whose education had been taken in hand by Mademoiselle Martha.

On the evening of the Sunday after the funeral, all the friends were assembled together. Madame Mongis was seated near Cambremer in front of the fire, which was brightly blazing. Her daughter was showing Baïa the engravings of a book borrowed from the chevalier's library, and endeavouring to make her understand what they represented. Paul Vernier was turning over the leaves, and blushing each time that his hand touched Martha's. This peaceful domestic scene might have made the most inveterate old bachelor envy the pleasures of home, and a stranger would have thought that the party formed but one family.

Each of them, however, had known sorrow in former times, but the younger persons present were now full of hope as to the future, and they forgot the past as they exchanged timid words and looks.

"You come very late to-night, Monsieur Paul," said Martha.

"I should have been glad to get away sooner, mademoiselle," replied the young man, "but Monsieur Bousenna leaves his office every evening at eight o'clock precisely, and he does not let me go till he goes himself."

"Does he ever mention me, my dear Paul?" asked Cambremer.

"Very often; and yet as a rule he devotes more attention to his accounts than to his visitors. Only yesterday he again asked me if I had known you long, and where I had met you."

"Did you tell him?"

"I couldn't very well do that, sir," said Paul, in a low tone.

The chevalier realised that he had hurt his young friend's feelings, for Paul did not like any allusion to his error, especially in the presence of Martha, and so he made haste to change the subject. Madame Mongis came to his help by bringing him back to the subject which interested him the most. "The police haven't discovered anything as yet, have they?" she asked, dejectedly.

"Nothing whatever. No disappearance has been reported. Inquiries have been made at all the hotels where foreigners usually put up, but nothing has been learnt about any one answering to the description of those we are looking for. It would seem, indeed, as though the murderer had met his victim on her arrival in Paris, and taken her straight to the theatre."

Madame Mongis shook her head doubtfully.

"There are times when I feel discouraged," said Cambremer, in a tone of sadness.

"Well, I think that I have found out a plan," said the widow, smiling.

"Tell me what it is then, madame; tell me at once!"

"Oh ! my plan cannot be very quickly carried out, or very easily either, but after a time it would, perhaps, succeed."

"Never mind how long it takes, if it leads us to the truth."

"It is Baïa who would have to carry it out herself."

"When she can understand and speak French you mean ? I hope a great deal from that as well as you do ; but who knows whether her child's memory will be sufficiently retentive ?"

"I have no doubt as to that ; but without waiting for her to be able to tell us the story of her life, couldn't we take her about Paris sometimes ?"

"What do you mean ?"

"Listen. It is certain that she doesn't know the city, but she would be intelligent enough to recognise the house where she previously lived if she happened to see it."

"That is an excellent idea !" exclaimed Cambremer, excitedly ; "and I don't know why it didn't occur to me before."

"There are some drawbacks, such as exposing our dear little charge to an accident or to being kidnapped ; but by taking precautions—"

"As for that, I will take care ; but why do you think—"

"Well, this morning, when I took her to church with me, it seemed to me that an ill-looking man kept near us."

"In the church ?"

"Yes ; perhaps I was mistaken, and he may have only been a beggar ; but I saw him again at the door as we went out."

"That's strange !"

"Yes, it was ; and what is quite as strange is that the poor child has no idea of religion whatever. She listened attentively to the service, but I realised from her expression that she didn't at all understand what was going on."

"I remarked her astonishment on the day of the funeral, and, moreover, I think that she was not brought up in Europe."

"Oh ! mother, look, look !" at this moment exclaimed Martha, pointing to the little girl who was gesticulating strangely.

She had with both hands seized hold of the book, of which Paul was turning the leaves, and was kissing an engraving which she had caught sight of.

"What ails you, my dear Baïa ?" asked Madame Mongis, rising and taking the child in her arms.

"*Dari ! Dari !*" repeated the child, placing her finger upon the picture. Her face had brightened and her eyes sparkled.

Madame Mongis bent forward, and saw that the engraving represented a Gothic château.

"Heaven is helping us !" exclaimed Cambremer, who had also approached ; "she must certainly have lived in that castle in her childhood."

"True ; she has recognised it, and is endeavouring to tell us so in her language," said Martha with agitation.

The chevalier gently tried to take the book, but Baïa held it tightly and pressed it to her heart as she leaped with joy. Paul looked on laughingly at the strange scene, and congratulated himself upon the lucky discovery which he had made in turning over the leaves of the old folio.

"Poor child !" sighed Madame Mongis, "this is the first moment of pleasure that she has known since she came here."

"Why do you want to take the book from her, Monsieur Francis?" asked Martha gently.

The chevalier did not heed Mademoiselle Mongis however, but still attempted to obtain possession of the object which the little girl so earnestly defended. She at last gave it to him and raised her large eyes, which were wet with tears, to his face.

"The name—let us see the name of the château," said Cambremer, eagerly, and as soon as he held the book in his hands, he went quickly towards the table, to examine the picture by the light of the lamp. But scarcely had he glanced at it, than he uttered an exclamation of disappointment. There was no explanatory lettering below the engraving. The château at sight of which Baïa had seem so delighted was an anonymous one as it were.

After the first moment of disappointment, the chevalier took courage again, and began rapidly turning the leaves, hoping to find some explanation. The folio looked like a book of travels, and it was natural to expect that at least the name of the country to which the château belonged would be found in it. But unfortunately, the volume was but a collection of prints bound together haphazard. There were Gothic cathedrals side by side with the monuments of Upper Egypt, tropical landscapes following after a panoramic view of Constantinople; but not a word of descriptive matter.

Cambremer, who had a great partiality for engravings, possessed a large collection of books of the same kind in his library. This one had been taken by chance out of a book-case and brought by Cassonade to Madame Mongis's rooms to amuse the little girl.

Dismayed by this fresh disappointment, the chevalier struck his forehead, as though to make the name of the château come into his brain, but in vain. He did, however, remember having bought these engravings from a dealer in second-hand books, and without inquiring where they came from.

Martha and Paul Vernier looked with some surprise at his dejected face, for they did not yet understand the cause of his annoyance. However, Madame Mongis, who understood it perfectly, went and bent over the book and in her turn vainly endeavoured to find some indication as to the name of the place.

As for Baïa she contented herself with repeating the word *Dari* as though it were a refrain, but no one knew what she meant; and she added whole sentences which were equally unintelligible. At the same time she laid her little hand upon that of Cambremer, who was turning over the leaves, and made him look back at the engraving which interested her so much.

"It is a perfect fatality!" exclaimed the chevalier in a tone of annoyance, "I just fancied that I had found a clue! How can people print an engraving without any title to show what it is?"

His discomfiture must have been great, indeed, to make him thus deny his partiality for "proofs before lettering."

"We may, perhaps, be wrong in despairing," now said Madame Mongis, "for there is nothing to prove that this château is really the place where Baïa was born. The child may have been deceived by a mere resemblance, for all old châteaux are very much alike; but what seems evident is that she was brought up a long way from Paris, in some feudal manor, and that is a valuable clue in itself."

"It may be valuable, but it is rather vague."

"Besides, Martha will try to get a clearer explanation from her. You will see how she makes her dear little pupil understand her."

Mademoiselle Mongis at once endeavoured to justify her mother's praises of her talent as a teacher. She took the child upon her knees, kissed her, placed her fore-finger upon the engraving and asked her, as she looked at her: "Did you live there?"

Baïa did not understand the words, but certainly she caught the meaning of the question, for she laid her head upon her hand, and closing her eyes, went through the pantomime which in every country expresses the act of sleeping.

"She slept there," said Madame Mongis, interpreting this dumb language.

"That is evident," muttered Cambremer, who had begun to examine the engraving more attentively.

It was an old etching, which was of some value. The details were remarkably clear, and the general effect of a kind which showed that it had been copied from a sketch made from nature. It was impossible that so complete and finished a design could be the work of fancy. It represented a somewhat singular landscape. In the background there was a cluster of beech-trees which rose up amid a plain extending to the hilly distance. In the foreground, on the left, were some blocks of stone singularly disposed; and in the centre between the stones and the tall trees, there was a castle which had distinct features of its own, whatever Madame Mongis might think and say.

It comprised a main building in the style of the Renaissance, flanked on the right side by a huge keep of much earlier build. In front there was a terrace, with a wide moat full of water. The chief characteristic of the building was a turret, or rather a steeple, which rose above the main entrance.

"Wherever can there be such a medley of different styles of architecture?" said the chevalier thoughtfully.

However Martha had not yet ended her investigations. She placed her rosy finger-nail upon the huge keep, and looked expressively at the child. Baïa at first made an affirmative gesture and then she hid her eyes with one hand while with the other she seemed anxious to hide the tower.

"Dear me," muttered Madame Mongis, "I fancy that she wants us to know that she was shut up in that tower."

"Yes, yes," muttered Cambremer, "and that giant was her jailer!"

Baïa realised that she was understood, and so she continued her pantomimic narrative by pointing to the moat and then to the plain with a gesture that was expressive of flight.

"She ran away, or she was taken away in that direction," added the chevalier.

Unfortunately, however clear the language of signs may be, it is necessarily limited to the expression of material acts, and there was no hope of obtaining by this means a full account of the misfortunes which had befallen the intelligent little orphan.

Martha, after a few useless efforts, gave up the questioning. Moreover, Baïa seemed tired, and it was growing late.

"Do not ask her anything more, mademoiselle," said Cambremer: "it is almost cruel, for the picture evidently reminds her of painful things."

"Besides, we have already learned a great deal," said Madame Mongis.

"Yes, I have surmised everything, and my presentiments did not deceive me; the scoundrel whom I am looking for must have im-

prisoned the mother and her child in that château until he brought them to Paris for the purpose of getting rid of them."

"Perhaps so; but on the other hand, if the unfortunate beings were in his power in that prison, why was the journey necessary?"

"To avoid suspicion, of course, and to prevent his crime from being known in the country around the château."

"What country can it be?" said Madame Mongis: "that is what we must find out."

"And I will find it out," said Cambremer, firmly. "It is certain that a copy of this engraving must be deposited at the Royal Library—copies of all the books and engravings issued are sent there, you know; so I will go there; and, even if I have to look over every engraving there, I will find this one. I will question the superintendent, and I cannot fail to—"

At this moment the door of the room was quietly opened, and Cassonade came in with a mysterious air. "I beg pardon, sir," said he, handing his master a sealed letter, "but here's something that was left with me for you."

"Who left it?" asked the chevalier, in surprise, for his correspondence was very limited.

"A man whom I don't know, and whom I found in the street before our door, where he seemed to be waiting for me. I had gone to buy some chestnuts at the corner of the Rue de Vaugirard; he laid the letter upon the bag which I held in my hand and mentioned your name, and then he went off without saying anything more."

"Give it to me," said Cambremer, who had a vague suspicion that the missive was a message from the Rue de la Lune. And, indeed, as soon as he had unsealed it, he exclaimed: "Yes, it's from Monsieur Gévaudan."

All the members of the little circle knew what he meant, and they looked up with curiosity, waiting to hear what news M. Joseph had sent.

The chevalier began to read aloud, and his voice trembled as he did so: "I asked for three days," wrote the private detective, "and I have taken six. You owe me a thousand francs more."

"The deuce!" muttered Cassonade.

"The man whom you are in search of," resumed Casse-Cou, continuing his perusal, "is named Jacques Biroulas. He smuggles goods across the Belgian frontier and into Paris. The woman who died in the private-box at the Odéon was his sister; the little girl is his niece. He killed the first and abandoned the latter in order to steal their fortune."

"Ah, the scoundrel! I thought as much," muttered the ex-grocer.

"He lives at present in a lonely house outside the city walls, but very near them, on the left hand when you have passed the Barrière d'Enfer. The door is painted red, and there is a sign up with the name of Biroulas upon it. You must go there to-morrow morning. You must enter the place and you will find him in his office, which is at the end of the courtyard on the ground floor. You can say that you have come to buy some coals, as he makes a pretence of dealing in them. You must look well at him while he is talking to you, and when you are sure that he is the man you want, you must make some excuse or other for going away. At nine o'clock at night come to my house, and give me a thousand francs for my time and trouble, and ten thousand francs to ascertain from me how you can insure his conviction, and that of his accomplice in the murder. If you act against them without having seen me, or if you tell any one that I am co-operating with you in this matter, everything will fall through. You

can take your friend Courapié with you to Biroulas's house, and you will do well to go there armed."

That was all; Cambremer laid the letter upon the table, and then, in a state of intense excitement, exclaimed: "At last I have them!"

VII.

HOW THE CHEVALIER HAD REASON TO REGRET HIS VISIT TO THE COAL MERCHANT.

"Do you know, sir, that Gévaudan is a very clever man?" said Cassonade, walking along beside his master, up the Allée de l'Observatoire.

It was striking eight o'clock in the morning, and the Luxembourg grounds were almost deserted. The gates had just been opened, and in winter time there are not many promenaders in the quiet garden. The chevalier and his squire had only met a few zealous students, who were going to the Law or the Medical School. They could scarcely be seen, for there was such a fog that even the lime-trees in the avenues were almost invisible. It was the very weather for a mysterious expedition, and Cambremer was perfectly delighted.

"Yes," said he, as he hastened on, "that spy is a skilful fellow, and I sha'n't haggle with him over his reward."

"Humph! as for that, he doesn't work for nothing; but if he hasn't deceived us, the information is worth a great deal."

"Why should he have deceived us? His interest is to earn his money as quickly as possible, and if he took six days instead of three, it is because he wished to make sure of what he had found out."

"But still I can't get over it," said Cassonade, "it is so strange that this fellow should have been able in less than a week's time to find a man whom the police wouldn't even try to discover."

"But all the statements which he makes are in accordance with the facts. The scamp is a smuggler and must travel frequently. That is how he came to bring his sister and his niece to Paris. The château in the engraving must be in Flanders."

"It may be that you are right."

"He must have taken them at once to some lonely house here, and then to the theatre on the following day, or perhaps on the very evening of their arrival. All that clearly explains why no one saw them, and why nobody had any knowledge of them at any of the hotels."

"The fact is that over there, beyond the Barrière d'Enfer, there isn't much chance of people being seen, and there can't be many neighbours."

"And above all else, as Gévaudan doesn't ask to be paid, until I myself have recognised the murderer, he evidently doesn't doubt the success of our visit."

"But, by the way, sir," said Cassonade, timidly, "are you sure of being able to recognise that chap's face at once?"

"When any one has once seen his eyes and teeth, they can't be forgotten."

"But you see there are persons who can disguise themselves so as to defy detection, and especially smugglers, who have to change their appearance in order to deceive the excise officers."

"You forget that he isn't aware that he is suspected, and, besides, he does not expect us."

"True," said Cassonade, laughing; "we shall catch him just as he's out of bed."

"I am only afraid of one thing," retorted Cambremer, "and that is that I shall not be able to control myself when I find myself in front of him."

"The deuce! That would be dangerous, for the scamp can't be alone in his den, and his gang might play us some ugly trick. I think that's why Monsieur Gévaudan advised you to go armed."

"That may be; and it is still another proof that he hasn't deceived me."

"Are your pistols loaded, sir?"

"Yes; I even took care to bring my hunting-knife," replied Cambremer, putting his hand under his coat.

"Well, fortunately, the ladies did not see it, for they would be still more anxious. If you had heard that dear good Mam'zelle Martha when I met her upon the stairs while you were dressing! Ah! she advised me over and over again to be very careful."

"Did she say anything about Baïa?"

"Yes; the little one was sound asleep, and has no idea that you are trying to recover her inheritance for her."

"Poor child! I cannot give her back her mother."

"But please tell me, sir; speaking about that, does she seem to you to be the niece of such a man as this Biroulas must be? So pretty and sweet and ladylike, and yet the niece of a smuggler, which is the same thing as a robber!"

The observation was certainly an acute one, and Cambremer was struck by it. "It's because she was not like him that he wanted to get rid of her," he said, after a moment's silence.

As they thus talked on, the chevalier and his faithful Cassonade had reached the Barrière or city limits. There had been no thought at that time of fortifying Paris, and the city did not extend beyond the wall which had been built during the reign of Louis XV., to the great chagrin of the citizens, who have never liked being shut in. This inclosure was bordered on the inside by some lonely boulevards, and beyond by some waste land; for the suburbs, especially on the south of Paris, were then but scantily inhabited.

All that now remains of the old inclosure is the massive pavilion which marks the spot where the Barrière d'Enfer once existed, and which conceals the main entrance to the Catacombs. This unsightly pile then served to shelter a detachment of green-coated excise officers, who had their scouts outside the railing. The municipal customs officials performed their functions with a rod in their hands, and their eyes on the lookout, for, at this early hour, the market gardeners' carts and the basket-carriers were coming in very fast.

"It is a strange idea for a man who smuggles to live so near an excise office," remarked Cassonade, as he passed the barrière.

"Why?" asked Cambremer; "didn't you ever hear that these people manage to introduce their merchandisc in Paris through subterranean passages?"

"True, it may be so; but we must now find the house where that scoundrel lives."

"The letter said, 'on the left.'"

"Well, I don't see anything, except some waste ground and the entrance of an old quarry."

"You had better inquire the way, perhaps."

"It would be safer; here comes an exciseman, who will inform us."

Going up to the exciseman, who was walking about with his pipe in his mouth, Cassonade touched his hat and said to him politely: "Can you tell me where Monsieur Biroulas, the coal-merchant, lives?"

The exciseman looked attentively at his questioner, and did not at once reply. "Go round behind that shed," said he, at last, "and fifty yards from here you will see the door of the house."

"Thanks, officer," rejoined Cassonade, and he went off with Cambremer in the given direction.

The man in the green coat watched them for an instant, and then hastened to his comrades.

The road which the chevalier followed was barely marked out, but after passing a shanty which impeded the view he saw a large building, surrounded by a high wall. "Let us agree as to what we had better do," he said to Cassonade without stopping. "I will do all the talking, and you must keep near the office door in order to secure our retreat in case of a surprise."

"Be at ease, sir; I have not got any pistols, but I have a stick; and, besides, I have good eyes and nimble legs."

In less than five minutes' time they reached a red-painted door, as M. Joseph had announced, and read the following inscription upon a bit of board: "Biroulas & Co. Belgian Coal."

Cassonade looked for a bell to ring, but he saw that the door was ajar, and he had only to push it to enter. He then found himself in a square yard where there were no coals, though some black patches of ground seemed to indicate that firing had once been stored there.

"The fellow's business does not seem to be very flourishing," thought Cassonade.

"At the end of the yard, on the ground floor," muttered the chevalier, repeating the directions given in the letter.

"Strange! one can walk in here as one could into a mill," remarked the squire; "there cannot be much to steal."

"The strangest thing of all is that there is no one about."

"Oh! but over there, sir, in front of us, there is an inscription with 'office' on it."

"You are right," said Cambremer, going quickly across the yard.

The inscription pointed out by Cassonade was posted up on a glass door, and on looking at it more closely the chevalier saw that it really ran as follows:

THE OFFICE

IS AT THE END OF THE PASSAGE.

Two steps to climb.

"Let us go in," said he.

"This must be the castle of the Sleeping Beauty!" exclaimed Cassonade, seeing that the passage was as deserted as the yard, and very dark besides.

However, Cambremer went forward stealthily, and felt the wall as he did so. This excursion in the dark soon made his squire impatient, for rapping with his stick he began to call out: "Here! shop! wake up, where are you?"

He had scarcely done so, and the chevalier was turning towards him to tell him to remain silent, when suddenly the floor gave way beneath them.

The first effect of a heavy fall is to deprive one of all consciousness of what is happening, even before the person who is falling again touches ground. This was the case with the chevalier and his squire. They lost their footing so suddenly that they did not know what had happened to them.

Cassonade uttered a loud shriek, while Cambremer had the courage or the presence of mind to keep quiet. But their fate was precisely the same, for, after whirling through the air, they felt a terrible shock and lost consciousness. Master and man had rolled one above the other, and they remained motionless so long that, had there been a witness of the scene, he would have thought them dead.

Cassonade was the first to recover from his swoon. He was aroused by an acute pain; his eyes burned, and when he opened them he found that numerous particles of some unknown substance obstructed his eyelids. And although he rubbed them hard, he was no better off than before. The pain had decreased, but he could not see at all.

The thought that he had become blind, suddenly came into his mind, but finally he remembered the accident which he had just met with and found that he was simply in utter darkness.

He stretched himself, rubbed his limbs, and realised with lively satisfaction that they were almost as active as before his fall; only his ribs pained him, and his head, which must have first struck the ground, felt like a great weight on his bruised neck. He was sitting up, and the soil around him yielded. "Ah! I have had the good luck to fall upon a pile of sand," thought he.

Then, all at once, while he was engaged in examining his body, the thought of his master returned to him. "Good heavens! where is the chevalier?" he exclaimed, feeling for Cambremer with both hands.

He soon found that a perfectly motionless body was lying beside him. "Ah! good lord! Monsieur Francis is dead," he shouted, in despair.

This cry awoke the echoes of the vault into which the two friends had fallen, and it undoubtedly had the effect of rousing the chevalier from his swoon, for he made a slight motion. "Sir, sir!" exclaimed Cassonade, shaking him, "are you hurt? Speak to me, pray speak! It is I, Courapié!"

Cambremer's reply was a sharp cry which went straight to the heart of the poor squire. "What ails you, sir? Where are you hurt?" he repeated, pressing the chevalier in his arms.

"Let go! let go! You hurt me dreadfully!" said his master, in a faint voice.

"Ah! thank Heaven! you are still alive, at all events!"

"Alive! yes; but I believe that my shoulder is dislocated, for I am in great pain."

Thereupon Cassonade began to tear his hair, uttering a series of oaths in which the name of Biroulas, the odious owner of the cavern, frequently recurred.

"Help me to get up," said Cambremer at last.

This was a difficult matter, owing to the darkness and the softness of the soil; but the squire succeeded in accomplishing it.

"It is the left shoulder," muttered the chevalier, "and I have so much dust or sand in my throat and mouth that I feel like stifling."

"So do I," Cassonade replied; but he quickly reproached himself for doing so, for his master needed his care, and he therefore began to support him as carefully as he could.

"Thanks, my friend, I feel better," finally said the chevalier, who had entirely recovered the use of his senses; "but what kind of precipice did we fall over?"

"We have fallen into a cellar sir, that's certain; and Heaven only knows how we shall get out of it!"

"It won't probably be as easy as falling into it, but we must try."

"Ah, the scoundrel! the villain! I knew very well that this cursed den would bring us misfortune."

"Complaining does not do any good," said Cambremer, stoically; "let us look for a door instead of mourning over what has happened."

"But how can we find one, sir, when it is as dark as pitch? Who knows whether we shall not fall into a still deeper hole while we are groping about?"

"Stay where you are, then, if you are afraid, and I myself will look for an exit."

The chevalier must have been insensible to pain to think of motion in the condition to which his fall had reduced him; however, the undertaking seemed to have little prospect of success. But Cassonade suddenly gave vent to an exclamation of delight.

"We are saved! we are saved!" repeated Pétronille's husband, fumbling in his pocket.

"Why? what have you found?"

"I hadn't thought of it!"

"Speak; tell me what you mean."

"We have a light; we shall have a light, I mean! for I have my phosphorus bottle."

The effect followed the promise; the sound of a bottle being uncorked fell upon the chevalier's ears and then a bluish light gleamed amid the darkness.

The ex-grocer had just made use of an invention, unknown at the present time. In those distant days there were no sulphur-matches, and a man named Fumade had bestowed upon France the so-called phosphorous bottle, which was a little vial in a red pasteboard case. A little bit of sulphured wood was dipped into a carefully-prepared paste, and three times out of ten one obtained a light.

Cassonade had hit upon one of the lucky chances, for his sulphur had caught fire, and he thanked Heaven that, on the evening before, he had crossed the Pont Neuf where Fumade sold the precious vials in one of the little shops, which have now disappeared, but which then stood out from the parapets of the bridge.

"Good luck never comes singly," now said the squire. "I have my rat besides." And thereupon he placed near the match one of those coils of stearine which are known in France as "cellar-rats," and the result was a tolerably effective light.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Cassonade, at sight of his master.

"What ails you? You are all black!" exclaimed the latter.

"So are you, sir; if I didn't know it was you, I shouldn't recognise you in the least."

Cambremer fully understood the cause of his transformation, and, in

spite of his sufferings, he could not help laughing. "We fell upon a pile of coal dust," said he, wiping his face.

"That must have been the reason why I couldn't breathe and why my eyes hurt me so much. I thought it was sand."

The two badly bruised men were in fact standing in the middle of a pile of black dust, and it was to this bed of soft combustible matter that they owed their survival.

"Good! that is an excellent sign," said the heroic chevalier; "if Providence were not protecting us, we shouldn't have fallen on that soft bed."

"But it didn't prevent you from being injured, sir, and you are suffering martyrdom."

"If I could only press my arm to my side, I should be in less pain. I feel as though I had a hundredweight tied to my shoulder."

"Wait a bit," said Cassonade, placing his "cellar-rat" upon the coal dust, and then taking a long woollen scarf from his neck—a present from the amiable Pétronille—he tied the chevalier's arm to his body with great care.

"That will do; now I can walk."

As soon as Cambremer was on foot, they began to examine the place where they found themselves. They noticed a wall, about six feet from where they stood. The "cellar-rat" did not give much light, and but a limited space could be explored by its help. They saw, however, that the cellar was closed in on one side by a pebble wall which appeared to be very old, while, on the other, it extended out of sight.

As for the height of the vault, it was impossible to measure it with the eye: for the faint gleam of the stearine did not penetrate the darkness overhead. The trap had evidently closed after giving way under their tread, for not a ray of light came from above.

"We are at the end of a gallery, which commences just below the passage by which we entered the house," said the chevalier; "we must now find out where this gallery leads."

"To the devil, most likely," muttered Cassonade.

"Well, we shall see. Come on!" And Cambremer began to follow the wall in the direction opposite to that which he had at first taken.

"But you are in no condition to go far, sir," said Cassonade; "this road seems to me to lead to the Catacombs, and when we have gone a hundred paces underground we shall be no better off than we are now."

"And what should we accomplish by staying here, my poor fellow?"

"Nothing, perhaps; but by remaining under the passage we might have a chance of being heard if we called out."

"Don't think of such a thing. To call out would probably ruin us. If our cries should be heard, one of two things would happen: either that man would suspect a danger and abscond, or else he would come here with other cut-throats like himself to murder us."

"Upon my word, sir," replied the sagacious Cassonade, "I should prefer chancing that to starving to death in this awful vault."

Cambremer reflected for a moment. He was naturally inclined to prefer the risk of violent measures to a slow and painful death. But the idea of still succeeding in his visit to M. Biroulas's was too tempting for him to neglect any means before going to that extreme. He had so much faith in the letter from M. Joseph, that he still hoped to surprise the man who

shielded himself by setting traps for his antagonists; however, Cassonade did not share these illusions.

"We shall have time enough to call for help after we have explored the vault," said the chevalier. "Take one of my pistols from my left hand pocket. I will take the other, and in case we meet any enemy we shall be able to defend ourselves."

The squire obeyed with a sigh, and soon, like his master, he had a weapon in his hand. At this moment, however, a sharp click was heard above their heads, and then there appeared a human body, which fell at their feet.

Cambremer's and Cassonade's first impulse, on seeing a man fall from above was to place themselves on the defensive. But the person who had arrived by this unusual though expeditious route had no thought whatever of attacking them. The poor devil had met with the same ill-luck as themselves, and had come down head-first upon the pile of coal dust.

They had the satisfaction of seeing him throw two or three frightful somersaults and land at last on the black heap. His limbs must have been more elastic, and his head harder than in their case, for he at once gave signs of life by uttering some frightful groans.

"He doesn't look very wicked," muttered Cassonade.

"Lift him up," said the chevalier; "I can cover him with my pistol."

The obedient squire thereupon began to help the singular visitor to rise. The new comer mechanically allowed Cassonade to do so, but when he was on his legs, he began to revolve, as though he were intoxicated. His fall had evidently so stunned him that he did not know where he was, or who was near him. However, after a few seconds, he succeeded in opening his eyes, and the first thing that he saw was Cambremer's pistol within two inches of his head.

The unfortunate man uttered a yell and drew back. "Mercy! good gentlemen," said he, clasping his hands; "have mercy, and I promise that I won't betray you."

"Why, I declare it's the exciseman whom we spoke to at the Barrière!" exclaimed Cassonade.

It was necessary to look sharply at the fellow to recognise him under the thick layer of coal dust which ornamented his countenance and lent additional grace to his green coat. It was he, all the same, however, and his fright was easy to understand.

With their weapons and the dust on their faces, the first arrivals in the vault had seemed to him to be a couple of bandits who had been lying in wait to annihilate him.

"We have no wish to harm you," said the chevalier, lowering his pistol.

"I promise you not to do it again, good gentlemen," rejoined the exciseman, in a piteous tone.

"To do what again?" asked Cassonade, who did not yet understand the situation.

"My friend," interposed Cambremer, "I repeat that you have nothing whatever to fear; but you must tell us—"

"All, my dear sir, everything; for you see it is no fault of mine. I am only a poor man, and I have to obey my superiors."

"I know that; but pray explain yourself. How did you happen to come here?"

"Ah! it will teach me not to be officious. My sergeant sent me here when I told him that I had seen two men going to Biroulas's house."

"Ourselves, of course."

"What! was it you, gentlemen?" exclaimed the exciseman in unfeigned astonishment.

"Come, did you take us for smugglers?" asked Cassonade, sarcastically.

"Well, you see," replied the exciseman, "the place has a very bad reputation, and—"

"But we came to buy some coals of Biroulas, and as ill luck would have it, we fell into this cellar, while going along the passage," said Chevalier Casse-Cou.

"Just like I did, gentlemen, just like I did; still I ought to have been on my guard, for I had reason to know that the scoundrel was capable of anything!"

"You know him, then?" eagerly asked Cambremer.

"Oh! only too well! The scamp is a perfect nightmare to us. We are sure that he's no more a coal-merchant than you are, and that he carries on smuggling on a great scale; but we have never been able to catch him at it. Still, since he has made off, we hope that we shall now be left in peace; all the same, however, I must needs fall into one of his villainous traps!"

"He has made off, you say?"

"A week ago. He knew that he had been denounced, and was being watched. Oh! he didn't take long to pack up. When we came here to make a search, we found the place empty. A rickety wooden table and some broken chairs were all that we found in the house."

"A week ago!" repeated the chevalier. "That is strange! Has he never returned here?"

"Oh! who knows? Perhaps by night time. That's why, when you asked the way, you know, I suspected something wrong, and I told my sergeant, who ordered me to follow you at a distance, and find out what you were up to. I came in quietly by the passage and—crack! down I fell!"

"Of course you did. The trap was still ready," said Cassonade.

"Who could have thought it? Why, we came here yesterday, myself and two of our men, and we didn't meet with anything amiss in the cursed shanty."

"The trap must have been got ready last night, then," muttered Cambremer. "It looks as though we had been expected here this morning."

"Well," said the ever prosaic Cassonade, "you have been as unlucky as ourselves, my good fellow; but never mind about our gymnastics or yours, the thing is to get out of this place."

Thus suddenly brought back to the realities of the situation, the exciseman turned pale and replied: "I'm afraid that we sha'n't be able to do so."

"Why not?" asked the chevalier. "This vault must pass under the city wall and lead somewhere inside Paris; we only have to follow it, and we shall certainly find an outlet."

"If there were one," said the exciseman, shaking his head, "we fellows should have found it, when we were sent from the custom-house, for we explored all the corners of the boulevard and all the houses."

"Well, I have an idea," said Cassonade; "your comrades won't wait all day without troubling themselves as to what has become of you, will they?"

"No; for I am to be on duty at noon."

"Well, when they find that you don't return, they will come here to look for you; the trap will still be ready—"

"Well?"

"And the first that comes in," resumed the ex-grocer, "will fall in here; we will receive him, and, while we are doctoring his bruises, the others who will have seen him fall will go for help, and we shall soon be taken out."

"True; that isn't impossible," said the chevalier.

At this moment, however, a sharp noise was heard. Cambremer raised his head, but saw nothing; though he understood what had happened. "A bolt has been shot to," said he; "and the trap-door won't work any more!"

"Ah, the scoundrel! He must have been on the watch and have heard us talking," said the exciseman.

"We are lost!" exclaimed Cassonade.

Cambremer began to fear that this was true; but he was a man whom danger and obstacles excited. "Go ahead, Cassonade!" said he, in a resolute tone. "I'll wager that we shall find our way out of this place somehow or other."

The squire did not share his confidence, but he obeyed; and the little party went on, by the light of the flickering "cellar-rat."

The exciseman sadly brought up the rear, and the chevalier, who was ahead, held his pistol in the only hand that he could use. The soil upon which they were walking sloped down preceptibly, and the vault seemed to be equally wide everywhere. It became more and more evident that it had been excavated for the purpose of communicating with the interior of Paris.

After walking a couple of hundred yards or more, the wanderers found a row of barrels set against the wall. Cassonade struck upon two or three of them with the butt of his pistol. There was no mistaking the sound which they gave forth; they were full.

"This is Biroulas's treasure!" said the ex-grocer, with a laugh.

"My conjectures are correct," added the chevalier; "and if this vault was built to facilitate smuggling, it must open inside Paris."

"What a prize!" said the exciseman, admiringly, "what a lot of liquor! it must be worth thousands!"

However, Cambremer did not give the fellow time to go into ecstasies over the rich spoil. He urged on his squire, and even complained that they were not proceeding fast enough. They then walked on for ten minutes more, the slope remaining the same, but suddenly the ground seemed gradually to rise.

"We have passed the city wall," said the chevalier, with inward delight.

"Upon my word, I am beginning to think that we shall get out of the hole!" cried the squire.

However, the exit, even if it existed at all, must be a long distance off, for the party still followed the now ascending slope and kept on for a quarter of an hour without coming to the end, or finding any signs of an outlet.

"I am not surprised that the authorities never found anything when they examined the cellars all along the Boulevard d'Enfer," said the exciseman. "We are certainly under the Rue de Vaugirard by this time."

Cassonade's face grew more gloomy as time went on. "It seems as though this tunnel hasn't any end," he muttered. "Perhaps we have mistaken the direction, and have been going away from Paris all this time."

"Then we should at least be under Châtillon," said the man in the green coat.

"That is impossible," rejoined Cambremer; "people don't excavate vaults for the pleasure of burrowing under the plain of Montrouge; besides, I perfectly remember well how the house stands; when we fell in the passage, we had Paris on our left, and we have been going to the left ever since we began to walk."

A few moments later an unexpected sight confirmed the chevalier in his hopes. Numerous bales of merchandise, and a long row of bottles piled up in symmetrical style almost blocked up the vault. This large accumulation of contraband goods seemingly indicated that an outlet was now near at hand.

"This time," said Cassonade, "I think we are getting there; but who knows what sort of an exit this disgusting place may have? It may be closed with gratings and bolts."

"We will break our way through," said the chevalier, firmly; "but keep on, keep on!"

The eagerness with which the squire obeyed this order had most unfortunate consequences. He hurried on so fast that he caught his foot in a rope tied round a bale of goods, stumbled and fell, with the result that his light was extinguished. He got up grumbling, for he had hurt himself badly, and his first thought was of his pain.

"I must be out of luck to-day," he growled; "this time it's my elbow that I've injured and the ground here is much harder than that coal-dust was."

"The worst of it is that our light has gone out," said Cambremer.

"Yes! good Lord! what will become of us in the dark?" exclaimed the exciseman.

"Don't be afraid, I'll light it again!" replied Cassonade; "give me time to find my 'rat' and everything will be all right."

The chevalier was far from sharing the confidence of his squire, and shuddered at the thought of the consequences which this commonplace accident might have.

"Ah, here it is!" said the grocer, on hearing whose encouraging words the chevalier heaved a sigh of relief.

Cassonade although he was in great pain, had gone down on his hands and knees, and by dint of fumbling about with his hands, he had found the precious cellar-rat.

"Good! we sha'n't perish here," said he, in a lively tone. "See what it is to be a man of precaution! If I hadn't my little utensils always about me, we should be in a nice mess. But thanks to Monsieur Fumade, in one touch and three moves we shall be all right!"

"Make haste, my friend; I am in great pain," interrupted Cambremer, whom this chattering annoyed.

"Ah! good heavens!" suddenly exclaimed Cassonade.

"What is the matter?"

"My phosphorus bottle! I thought I had in it the pocket of my pantaloons—but dear me—how awful!—I really can't find it!"

"Look for it well," said the chevalier, feigning an amount of composure which in reality he did not possess.

"Ah! perhaps it is in the pocket of my overcoat; but no; there is nothing there! I felt sure, however—"

"It has no doubt fallen on the ground. It fell out when you slipped, I suppose," said Cambremer.

"I will look for it with you," put in the exciseman, in an agitated tone.

"Mind, my friends, I won't stir," said Cambremer, "it is important that we shouldn't move from the spot where the accident happened, and if we all attempt to look for the bottle, we shall lose our starting-point."

"Besides, with your dislocated shoulder, you wouldn't be able to help us."

The search again began, and the chevalier while awaiting the result indulged in many bitter thoughts. He was tempted to believe that there was a fatal influence at work, and he regretted that he had not followed his squire's advice and called out when they were still under the trap-door. However feeble the chance might have been of attracting attention by an outcry, it would have been better to risk it than to perish miserably in the vault. It was now as difficult to go back in the darkness as to proceed onward. The profound silence of the vault was only broken by the sound of the movements made by the two men who were making the search, and the faint exclamations to which they gave vent as they turned from corner to corner, still having failed.

The exciseman was the first to grow weary of groping about on his hands and knees, and hurting his fingers on the rough ground. "We are lost," he muttered, as he rose up.

This seemed only too likely, and Cambremer did not feel capable of contradicting the fellow's despairing words.

"I give it up," said Cassonade, at last.

The chevalier then reflected that the phosphorus bottle might have been forgotten on the heap of coal dust when they had been startled by the exciseman's sudden fall into the cellar. "Have you the strength to go back there?" said he to Cassonade.

"I have strength enough and to spare," replied the poor squire, "but I have no hope of success. How could I find a small object lying three-quarters of a mile from here, and without a light, when I should be puzzled to find it even if I had one? Why, I might as well look in the dark for a needle in a bundle of hay!"

"Well then, death is our only prospect," said Cambremer, quietly.

The exciseman uttered a despairing groan.

"If we must die here," exclaimed Cassonade, "let us at least try to get to the end of this infernal hole."

"You are right, and even if we dash our heads against a wall, it is better to keep on."

"Take hold of my coat," rejoined the squire, "I will go ahead and the officer can follow you. If there should be a hole anywhere, I had better be the first to fall into it."

In saying this, the good-hearted fellow was thinking of his master, despite the frightful situation in which they found themselves. His solicitude for Cambremer's welfare took precedence of everything else.

The order which he proposed was adopted, and they again went on. However, it was only by feeling the wall, and very slowly, that they succeeded in progressing. No one spoke, and the chevalier made every effort

to abstain from groaning whenever shaken by the uncertain steps of his guide. The ground had become very unequal, and Cassonade frequently stepped upon stones which had probably fallen from the vault above. They still continued ascending, and, in fact, the slope became more and more abrupt. Cambremer noticed all this, as Christopher Columbus, when he neared America, remarked the signs indicating that land was not far distant. It became more and more evident that they were nearing the end of their terrible journey, but this certainty was only partially consoling. How did the vault end? Was there a trap-door similar to the one in the passage, or a hidden door in a wall, or a wall without any outlet?

While the chevalier was thinking over this painful problem, his squire suddenly gave vent to a cry of pain which was presently followed, however, by the triumphant exclamation: "A flight of steps! We are saved!"

"Are you speaking the truth? Is it really possible?" stammered Cambremer.

"Feel it? I am on the lower step already."

And, in fact, the chevalier felt the stone steps with the only hand which he could use, and at the same time he found that the vault had grown strangely narrow. He only had to move three paces aside to touch the wall.

"Remain here, sir; I will go up alone, and if I find an exit, I will call out to you."

The anguish of these three lost men had now reached a climax. They were about to learn their fate.

Cambremer, exhausted by grief and pain, leant against the wall while the search which was to settle the question of life or death was being made. The fiat was not long delayed. As Cassonade mounted the ninth step his head struck the ceiling.

"There is a wall everywhere," he called out.

"You must be mistaken," said his master, "these steps cannot have been made for nothing. Try again."

"I find a place where the stone feels smooth. It seems as though the wall were in a single piece. Ah! there is a long split which I can trace with my fingers."

"It must be a swing door. It must be moveable—press on it with all your might."

They could now hear Cassonade breathing hard as he complied with these instructions. "No, it resists," he said, "it is an enormous block of stone, and ten men could not stir it."

"Then there must be a secret—a hidden spring. Can't you find some projection, a knob, anywhere?"

Again came a moment's silence during which Cambremer could hear the beating of his heart.

"Nothing!" said Cassonade, at last.

This word sounded like a sentence of death.

"Then, it's all over," murmured the chevalier, seating himself upon the first step of the fatal flight.

The faint ray of hope which had so soon been extinguished made the frightful reality more painful. Cassonade, after a long and careful search, had become utterly discouraged. The exciseman had thrown himself upon the ground, and was sobbing.

"It is impossible that there should be no outlet," said Cambremer, "but probably the secret door only opens from the outside, so that the sole chance we now have is that the smugglers may come here to remove their goods."

"We may die here before it occurs to them to do that," sighed Cassonade. "Their leader, that scoundrel Biroulas, knows perfectly well that we are caught in the trap, and he will take good care not to let us out."

"You have one of my pistols, I think," said the chevalier, suddenly. "Isn't that the case?"

"Yes," replied the ex-grocer.

"Well, then, do as I do"

A loud report resounded through the vault, being repeated again and again by the echoes with formidable intensity. Cambremer had fired. He had done this in the hope that the sound might attract those who were, perhaps, waiting for his last agony beyond the wall, and so as to make them believe that he had committed suicide. Cassonade understood him, and he acted similarly.

For some moments the chevalier listened attentively, but nothing stirred, and he was obliged to admit that his last experiment had been fruitless. Death would be slow, sure, and full of suffering—death by hunger, which tortures the body, troubles the brain, and breaks down all courage. And yet, Cambremer did not think of death. He was thinking of the child to whom he had vowed to devote his life, and his bitterest regret was that he would never see her any more.

"My friend," said he to Cassonade, who had drawn near to him, "I feel that my strength is giving way, and I don't wish to die until you forgive me for having led you—"

"Led me!" interrupted the faithful squire. "Ah! I came with a good will and I have nothing whatever to forgive. I love the poor little girl as much as you do, and I should not complain of dying if I had only succeeded in helping her."

"Swear to me, then, that if you survive, you will protect her as I myself would have done!"

"I swear it with all my heart, sir! but it is idle to do so, for I sha'n't be able to leave this place any more than you will."

Cambremer lacked the courage to insist on the subject. As for the unfortunate exciseman, he was overwhelmed with grief, and had sunk into a state of complete torpor. Cassonade, on his side, remained silent, for fear of increasing his master's grief by cruel remembrances.

A frightful silence pervaded the long black vault where naught was visible—the silence of the grave!

VIII.

IN WHICH THE YELLOW CABRIOLET AGAIN TURNS UP.

"WELL, Jacqueline, I have had a good day, and now's the time for supper."

Morillon, the driver, who addressed this little remark to his wife, had just driven his famous yellow cabriolet under the shed which served him as a coach-house, in the Rue de Vaugirard.

La Grise, who was unbridled but not unharnessed, was eating her feed between the shafts with an appetite derived from several long journeys since daylight.

The faithful mare undoubtedly knew that she was not at the end of her labours, for she was making as much haste as possible to empty the bag which her master had hung below her jaws, and she glanced mournfully

from time to time at the deserted street. But there was no "fare" to be seen; night had just fallen, and Morillon, relying upon an hour's rest, had gone into his own house, which communicated with the shed by a door which always stood open.

His lodging consisted of two rooms, which served for a great variety of purposes. In the first one, he took his meals, polished up his harness, or smoked his pipe, according to the hour; while the faithful Jacqueline cooked at the fire in a small chimney-place. The second room was almost entirely filled with an immense bedstead, which had probably been brought to Paris from some country place. Morillon only entered this apartment to sleep, but his wife spent her days in it in mending her stockings or other clothing.

The simple rooms had been partitioned off from a long wooden structure which ran along one side of the yard of an old deserted house. The driver, tempted by the rent of the place, which was very low, and by the fact that the shanty, serving him as a coach-house, communicated direct with the street, had been installed there for a year past, and did a fairly good business.

The place was far from the centre of Paris, but the neighbourhood was sufficiently populous to supply Morillon with plenty of jobs, and he worked on his own account. He owned his cab and his mare; the Paris General Cab Company did not exist at that time, and there were but few omnibus-lines. So everything was for the best both as regards his avocation and the place he had chosen. It thus happened that he was almost always in good spirits, and that day in particular he rubbed his hands like a man who is well satisfied with life.

"You have come just in time; the soup is ready," said Jacqueline, a little woman with a buxom figure, who was lively in her movements, and carried her forty years remarkably well.

"Well then, lay the table, and let us attack the provisions; I'm as hungry as a wolf," rejoined her husband.

The preparations for the feast did not take long, for a tablecloth was not looked upon by the good couple as a necessary accessory, and they never felt any need to change plates.

"That's capital!" said Morillon, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, after he had gulped down a large allowance of soup; "it reminds me of the soup we used to have at La Roche, in my old master's time."

"Poor man!" sighed Jacqueline, "he was a generous soul, so kind to his servants, and good to the poor. He gave everything away."

"Yes; all he had, and in his last days but little remained to him, for almost everything had gone at the gaming-table, and they say that his widow has only just enough left her to live on."

"All the same, he was greatly regretted in the neighbourhood, and if ever his son should make a fortune and buy back the farm, I would go back with pleasure to live with that good Madame Vernier."

"There's no chance that anything of the kind will happen. You see, Jacqueline, it's in the blood; the son will gamble just as his father did, and instead of saving up enough to buy La Roche back from the banker who bought it, I fancy that he'll squander the little that remains to his mother."

"Well, I don't care. I should be very glad, all the same, to see little Paul."

"So should I; but I shouldn't know him again; we went away when he

was no higher than my boots. Pour me out a glass of wine, Jacqueline, my girl."

"All right, my man! Eat and drink your fill, as you've had a good day," replied the housewife, gaily.

"Well, yes, and I never have anything to complain of, nowadays. My good luck began on the night when I took up that gentleman at the Odéon, you know, the man who left me in front of Frascati's, and gave me five gold louis to help him to take a drunken man to his own house."

"The louis are put away in the woollen stocking," said the prudent Jacqueline; "they'll go towards getting another horse in place of La Grise, when the poor beast cannot keep up any longer."

"Oh! that's a long way off! Would you like to know what she has done to-day?"

"Yes, tell me about it, while I take my pork and cabbage off the fire."

"Well, just think, I was engaged for five hours this morning, by a man who left me just as twelve o'clock struck, near the Barrière Fontainebleau. That made me eight francs already, and I was walking the mare along the Boulevard d'Enfer, when I saw a young fellow who was leaning against a tree, and seemed to be quite out of breath. I scented a customer, and I'm never mistaken. It didn't miss; he made a sign to me. So I stopped La Grise; he hurried into the road, and I hadn't time to get a good look at him before he had climbed up beside me."

"Pierre, taste this!" said the housewife, placing a smoking dish upon the table.

"It smells very nice," said Morillon, attacking the pork and cabbage.

"Well, where did you take your 'fare' from behind the tree?"

"You shall see. 'Driver,' said he to me, in a queer kind of voice, 'here are ten francs; go as fast as you can, down the Faubourg Saint Jacques, and don't stop, even if you are called to.' At the same time he slipped two five-franc pieces in my hand, and he seemed to be trembling as though he had been running very fast."

"I'll venture to say that he had been up to a bad trick."

"I don't say that he hadn't, although it isn't usual with his sex."

"What do you mean by his sex?" asked Jacqueline, who was no scholar.

"Aha! you see!" said Pierre, with a loud laugh, "my customer turned out to be a woman dressed as a man, and it was easy to see it, too, for she was mighty pretty, with eyebrows as black as harness-polish, and eyes as bright as coach-lamps."

"After all, the carnival hasn't long been over, and your young woman had been having a little fun at the Barrière," remarked Jacqueline.

"As to that, you are wrong, she was too much upset for that, and I suspect that there was a jealous husband or a lover in the matter. She was as pale as death, and had such a spiteful look too."

"And where was she scampering to like that?"

"Well, I can't tell you, for I do not know the end of the story. We went along the Faubourg, and then along the Rue Saint Jacques to the quay. My young woman complained that we didn't go fast enough, and if I had listened to her, I should certainly have killed the mare."

"For a good-for-nothing creature like that!" exclaimed Pierre's wife; "no—no—you must never do that."

"Oh! of course I sha'n't; still I went as fast as I thought proper, and it

did not take me more than half an hour to bring her through the Halles and up the Rue Montorgueil to the corner of the boulevard."

"She had told you, then, where she was going?"

"Why, yes and no. At each turn she called out: 'That way! to the left!' or, 'straight ahead!' and on I went, but at the end of the Rue Poissonnière she told me to stop. While I was reining up, I felt that she was slipping two more five-franc pieces into my hand, and I didn't need any coaxing to take them. 'If I'm not here in an hour's time,' she whispered in my ear, 'you may go away.' And then she got out."

"Didn't she come back?"

"Not she. She had stopped me so that I shouldn't know where she was going. I only saw her turn the corner of the boulevard, and I noticed an old man wrapped up to the eyes, who seemed to be waiting for her, but that's all I know about it."

"Well, you see, Pierre, that kind of thing doesn't go on among us folks, and the Parisians are a queer lot."

"Bah! I've my twenty francs in my pocket, and with my other jobs it'll make nearly two louis to put with the others. The rest doesn't concern us; and we'll drink a glass to the health of that young woman, from a bottle of our old wine, which you must bring me up from the cellar."

"From the cellar?" repeated Jacqueline, in a strange tone; "no, indeed!"

"Oh! good!" said Pierre, laughing, "still your old story of ghosts!"

"It's no story at all, and I wouldn't go down to the cellar for five hundred francs!"

"But, my dear girl, that's all very well for the country—that talk about ghosts; but in Paris ghosts don't venture to show themselves, for they would be taken to the police-station."

"Pierre, you are talking like a stupid, and if you had heard what I've heard, no longer ago than to-day—"

"Come now, what did you hear, Jacqueline?" asked the driver, with a chuckle.

"Why, some noises that were not natural, that's sure, and I was dreadfully frightened."

"Well, tell me all about it!" said Pierre, swallowing another glassful of the wine that was upon the table.

"Well, then, I went this morning into your good-for-nothing cellar, and all of a sudden all the bottles began to jingle as though there had been a thunderclap below them, or rather, as though the devil had been rolling his chariot along."

"What stuff! You must be crazy!"

"No, no; I'm not crazy, and I know what I'm talking about; and all this is your fault. You had no business to come and live in a place that is said to be haunted. The whole neighbourhood knows it!"

Morillon had driven about Paris too much not to be a free-thinker, and he wished to put an end to his wife's fears once for all. "Take the candle," said he, rising, "and come for a turn in hell with me."

"Driver!" at this moment shouted a voice which came from the shed; "Ho, driver! I want your cab; I'm in a hurry!"

"Here I am, sir; here I am!" called out Morillon, turning to obey the call of his fare.

"Business before everything else," was the hard-working driver's motto, and he would have left all the meals and all the cellars in the world for the

sake of a job. But the person in search of a cab was in such a hurry, that he crossed the shed and the threshold of the room, repeating in an agitated tone: "Quick, quick, my good man! I've no time to wait."

Jacqueline, who was holding the candle, placed her hand between her eyes and the light, so as to throw the latter full upon the new-comer. "Why! good heavens!" said she, "it must be—but, no—yes—it is Monsieur Paul!"

"What!" exclaimed her husband at the same moment; "the fellow that was drunk the other night!"

The two simultaneous exclamations amazed the new comer, and utterly bewildered him. Paul Vernier—for it was he—had heard his name mentioned by a woman whom he did not remember having seen before, while a driver, equally unknown to him, recalled a story of drunkenness that was only too correct. It was enough to astound him, and make him momentarily forget for an instant the affair that had brought him to the place.

"What! don't you remember me, Monsieur Paul?" ejaculated the housewife; "it is I, Jacqueline, you know—Jacqueline, who made you such nice cakes at La Roche, when you were a little fellow?"

"What! is this gentleman the son of poor Monsieur Vernier who's dead and gone?" muttered Pierre; "no, it can't be possible—good heavens, no!"

Paul went quickly up to Jacqueline, and looking attentively at the good woman, he finally remembered her face. "Yes, yes, I remember," said he, hastily; and, as though he had not even five minutes to spare so as to talk over the past; "I am glad to see you again. Some other time you must tell me all about yourself, but to-night I must make haste—your husband will take me."

"As to that, I'll take you wherever you wish," said Morillon, "and at a sharp trot, too; La Grise has had a rest, and you will be pleased with her speed. Come, my dear, give me my cloak and glazed hat," said he to his wife; "the nights are cold."

Jacqueline ceased giving vent to her joyous exclamations, and hurried into the next room to find the articles which her husband had asked for.

"All the same, my young sir," said the driver, as he went in to the shed to bridle his mare, "when I helped that kind gentleman in the Rue Férou to carry you up to bed, I didn't dream that I was carrying the son of my old master—for I lived with your father, too, so I did—"

These remarks were interrupted by a shriek from Pierre's wife, who reappeared, looking terribly frightened.

"What's the matter, now?" asked Morillon.

"The noise—in the cellar—" said Jacqueline, in a trembling voice; "if you are going away, I won't stay here!"

"Pooh! pooh! shut the trap-door and you will not hear anything. At your orders, sir!"

And thereupon the driver, without paying any attention to his poor wife's terror, took his coat and hat from her hands, and hurried to the cabriolet. La Grise was quickly bridled while Jacqueline continued lamenting like a deserted Ariadne.

Paul sprung into the vehicle almost without touching the step. "To the Barrière d'Enfer!" said he to Morillon, who had taken his place beside him, and was gathering up the reins.

"All right; it won't take long," replied the driver, with the usual click

of the tongue to start his mare, and then the cabriolet rattled out of the shed, and turned the corner.

"Get back as fast as you possibly can, at all events!"

This last appeal on the part of Jacqueline to her husband, was lost amid the rumble of the wheels. Morillon had not praised La Grise too highly, for she darted along over the slippery pavement like a deer.

"And pray, how is the gentleman who lives in the Rue Fèrou?" asked Pierre, to keep up the usual practice of chatting, which was then so common among drivers.

"I am going to try and find him," replied Paul, in a tone of deep emotion, "and Heaven grant that nothing bad has happened to him!"

"What the mischief are you telling me? Such a good man as that! a man who gave me a hundred francs just as though it had been a hundred sous!"

"He went away this morning to attend to a—a matter that ought not to have detained him more than two hours at the most, and he has not yet returned."

"That's strange! and, besides, the suburbs are not safe in these times."

"Do you know the house of a man named Biroulas, just beyond the Barrière?"

"A big building which isn't occupied now, and where there used to be coals for sale?"

"That is the place."

"The deuce it is! If the gentleman went there, I think it looks badly for him. There are some nasty stories told about that shanty—"

"Stories about smugglers, are they not?"

"Yes; but if you wish to pick up any information, it is at the excise office that you must ask for it, and there we are now."

Three minutes after this conversation the cabriolet drove up to the railing, and Paul began to question the excisemen on duty. At the first words he spoke he found that he was listened to with the utmost attention.

The excisemen made him tell them several times over how Cambremer and Cassonade were dressed, and while he was talking, they exchanged strange looks. At last one of them begged him to alight and speak to the principal officer.

Although somewhat surprised by this request, Paul alighted and went towards the pavilion, followed by Morillon, who had left his mare in the care of the men on guard. When he found himself in the presence of a person who was probably the superintendent of this excise-post, the young man resumed his narrative, dwelling upon his anxiety as to the chevalier and his squire. In order to receive him, the official had interrupted the preparation of a report which he had been writing. "Well, sir," said he, gravely, when Paul had ceased to speak, "I came here for the express purpose of investigating the strange events which have taken place to-day at Biroulas's house."

"Strange events!" repeated the young man in terror; "have my friends been the victims of violence? have they fallen into any trap?"

"I don't know; but I can tell you that an exciseman who followed the men whom you call your friends has not reappeared."

"That is very strange!"

"And I have strong reasons for believing that that exciseman has paid dearly for the zeal which he displayed in watching the accomplices of the man named Biroulas."

"What accomplices do you allude to, sir?" anxiously asked Paul.

"Why, the two men whom you have come to inquire about," coldly replied the official.

"That is an insinuation which I indignantly repel in their name!"

"Your testimony seems to me to be insufficient, and you yourself must admit that the whole matter ought to be investigated before I can take your word for them. The man named Biroulas is a smuggler, and he is quite capable of more serious offences than smuggling; now, your friends knew him, and chose the very day on which we intended to arrest him, to pay him a visit. We have good reason to conclude from all this that they went to his house to warn him."

"But this is infamous!"

"No improper remarks, if you please. Confine yourself to explaining to me the real motive of their visit to such a suspicious place."

Paul's embarrassment was evident. He did not consider himself at liberty to tell the first person he met all about Cambremer's private affairs, and he tried to get out of the difficulty by making an evasive answer. "It was for a very simple reason: they went to buy some coals," said he.

"Indeed!" remarked the official, in an ironical tone; "they went to buy coals at a place where no coals have been sold for six months past."

The young man did not reply.

"Do you know, sir," added the functionary, "that an individual of your age and about your height was noticed this morning passing the Barrière Saint Jacques, and running as fast as he could? He was seen to get into a yellow cabriolet—quite similar to the one that is waiting for you at the gate."

The official dwelt intentionally upon these last words.

"A yellow cabriolet! That was my one!" exclaimed Morillon, who had so far listened to the talking without saying a word.

"You confess it, then?"

"Certainly, and I can tell you, besides, that the individual in question was a woman disguised as a man, and she made me take her as fast as I could to the Boulevard Poissonnière. I half fancy, now I call it to mind, that she had been up to some mischief or other at Biroulas's house."

"What you tell me is very unlikely, very improbable indeed," said the official, looking the driver full in the face.

However, Paul had listened attentively to the information given by Morillon. "What kind of a woman was she?" he asked, anxiously.

"Tall, thin, and dark, with black eyes and a haughty look."

"It was she!" exclaimed Vernier, unguardedly, for by this description he had recognised his evil genius from Frascati's.

"Good! it seems that you know who the person was."

This remark, made by the official, brought Paul back to the realities of the situation. He attempted to explain, with a deal of hesitation, and in a most round-about fashion, what connection he had had with the suspicious person alluded to by Morillon; but he finally perceived that his listener took a lively pleasure in trying to make him commit himself.

A clerk came in at this inconvenient moment to interrupt him. The fellow had with him a cap belonging to the exciseman who had disappeared, this convincing proof having been found near the stairs in Biroulas's house. Its discovery was, in fact, the sole result of three hours' careful searching.

"Well, sir," said the official to Paul, after having listened to his subordinate, "this affair is assuming a more and more serious aspect; the search will

continue to-morrow, and I shall, if necessary, order the Catacombs to be searched also. It is absolutely necessary that you should be on hand, and I should be wanting in my duty if I allowed you to leave before this mystery is cleared up."

"But you have no right to detain me here in this way!" exclaimed Paul, terrified at the thought that Madame Mongis and her daughter would be waiting for him in mortal anxiety.

"Shut this gentleman up in the little room," quietly ordered the terrible official; "take the driver to the guard-room, and put the horse and the cab in the pound."

"I know very well that I shall be let out to-morrow," growled Morillon; "but between now and then my poor Jacqueline may die of fright, what with all her ideas about ghosts and those things."

IX.

SHOWING HOW CAMBREMER'S NEIGHBOURS HAD CAUSE TO REGRET GOING OUT
SO LATE.

It was not without apprehension that Madame Mongis and her daughter had seen the chevalier start off on his expedition early in the day. The undertaking had seemed very dangerous to them, and they considered that Biroulas's house must be unsafe. The worthy widow had attempted, on the evening before, to dissuade Cambremer from his purpose by pointing out to him the dangers of a visit to a smuggler's retreat; but all the reasoning in the world could not move the chevalier. He had tried to reassure his neighbours by promising them to be prudent, to return quickly, and then to tell them the result of his hazardous expedition. Still, in spite of these fine promises, they did not close their eyes all night, and Martha, who rose very early, placed herself upon the stairs, so as to waylay the faithful Cassonade and give him a deal of good advice.

The morning passed away quietly. Household cares, dressing Baïa, and preparing breakfast, filled up the time, and did not leave the ladies a moment to be anxious. But when Madame Mongis heard twelve o'clock strike, without the absentees having returned, she could not help feeling very much alarmed.

Her daughter was as much frightened as she was, and could not keep still, but kept running every moment to the window to see if the chevalier and the squire were not at the corner of the Rue Férou. However, like Sister Anne in the tale of "Blue Beard," she saw no one coming, and returned dejectedly to resume her seat by her mother's side.

Through truly womanly delicacy, neither of Cambremer's friends liked to tell the other how anxious she felt for fear of alarming her companion still more. They worked silently at their embroidery, while the little girl played beside them.

Baïa, by the way, seemed to guess that her protectresses had some anxiety weighing upon them, for she often raised her large eyes, as though to read their faces. She even kissed them more tenderly than ever, and more than once, as though she had detected their distress upon their countenances, and she seemed to be endeavouring to console them.

When the twilight came, Madame Mongis could no longer control her-

self. "We cannot remain thus without news of Monsieur Cambremer," said she, "and I think that I had better go to look for him."

Martha, though fully sharing her mother's feelings, endeavoured to prove to her how useless and imprudent such an attempt would be. "I won't let you go alone, mother," said the young girl, "and if I go with you, who will there be to keep watch over Baïa?"

"You are right; and I have too many reasons to fear that the dear little one may be stolen from us, to leave her alone in that way."

At last, Martha timidly remarked that M. Paul would surely come to see them as soon as he was at liberty, and that it would be better to send him to make inquiries.

Her mother admitted this, and made up her mind to be patient, although the time seemed very long to her. However, to their great delight, the young fellow put in an appearance three hours earlier than usual. He seemed full of hope, and evidently expected to hear some good news from his friend the chevalier, but his face clouded when he was made acquainted with the alarming situation. Still, he endeavoured to appear calm in order not to frighten the ladies, and he even tried to reassure them.

"It is easy to account for this delay," said he, affecting a tranquillity which he was far from feeling; "Monsieur Cambremer has, perhaps, been obliged to go at once to that detective in the Rue de la Lune, especially if he recognised that man Biroulas, as is more than probable."

"He would have had to pass our windows to go there," replied Madame Mongis, shaking her head with an air of doubt; "and even supposing that he didn't take time to come up here, he would certainly have already returned, by this time, from that Monsieur Gévaudan's house."

"Besides, you know, Monsieur Paul," said the young girl, "he was not to see him till nine o'clock this evening."

Paul looked dejected, and admitted in his own mind that it could only be some serious cause that had detained the chevalier. However, he made an attempt to divert the minds of Cambremer's friends from the subject by talking of other matters. "My employer was in a very good humour to-day," said he, gaily, "and the reason why I came so early is that, for the first time in six months, he let me go at dusk, giving me leave until to-morrow morning."

Martha usually listened very attentively to all the particulars which the young man gave as to his daily life, the work that he did at M. Bousenna's office, and the way in which he employed his time outside of office hours; but she now scarcely lent an ear, and the prospect of spending the evening with Cambremer's young favourite did not dispel the cloud from her fair face.

"Monsieur Paul," said she, in a low tone, "my mother and I have a request to make of you."

"A request! I shall be too happy to grant it; pray tell me what it is, mademoiselle."

"But we will only allow you to do so, on one condition, which is, that you will not risk your life."

Paul made that happy gesture with which a man in love defies danger when it is a question of serving the object of his affection.

"It seems to me," resumed the young girl, "that you might go to the Barrière d'Enfer and inquire—"

"Whether any violent scene has taken place in that dreadful house,"

interrupted Madame Mongis; "if so, it must be known in the neighbourhood."

"And if I learn nothing there," said the young man, impetuously, "I will go to the house, I will break into that scoundrel's den, and—"

"No, Monsieur Paul, I beg of you!" said Martha hurriedly; "promise me—promise us both that you will not go beyond the Barrière, and that you will take a cab and return within two hours at the most."

"I promise you, mademoiselle, and I will start at once."

He was already on the landing, and Madame Mongis called out to him not to be reckless.

"He is an excellent young man," said she, when she was again alone with her daughter.

"Yes, indeed; and I am almost sorry that I made this suggestion. What if any harm befell him!"

"Heaven would not visit his poor mother with such sorrow."

"I do not know her, and yet I love her; perhaps it is because, like you, she has had a great deal of sorrow already."

Madame Mongis could not help smiling on hearing her daughter give this reason for her feelings as regards Paul's mother. Since she had a hope of obtaining some news of her dear neighbour, the worthy widow had grown calmer. To quiet her impatience, she now began to make preparations for the evening meal, for her limited means did not admit of her keeping a servant, and although for several days past Cassonade had placed himself at her orders, she had barely availed herself of them.

That evening, supper occupied even less time than usual, and they seated themselves at table with sad faces. An hour had already gone by, and Paul Vernier had not reappeared. Each time a passing vehicle rumbled Martha listened attentively, but everything went past, and the rumbling died away far down the Rue de Vaugirard. "It is not he," she would say, laying down her knife and fork, which she barely made use of.

Baïa followed her movements with the utmost attention, and it was evident that her childish mind was busy at work as to the cause of so much restlessness. "Francis!" suddenly said the little girl, pointing to the place where Cambremer usually sat whenever he shared his friends' repasts.

"She remembers his name, and she understands that his absence troubles us," said Madame Mongis, sadly.

"Oh, mother, what if he should be in danger!" exclaimed Martha; "I do not know why, but I feel as though we were threatened with misfortune. I am not superstitious, but I am afraid—"

"I am only afraid as regards Monsieur Cambremer and the poor devoted fellow who went with him."

"I fear for them, and for Monsieur Paul, too," replied the young girl in a lower tone; "for time is passing, and—"

"It is time to put the child to bed," said Madame Mongis, to change the subject.

Martha at once rose from the table. She cared little for eating, as a rule, and that night she did not care for it at all. She felt that need of motion which arises from anxiety, and with feverish haste she began to put her dear little sister to bed. Baïa seemed tired, as though she had felt the troubles of the day as well as her friends. She went to bed willingly, and Mademoiselle Mongis, after watching at her side for half an hour, saw that she was quietly sleeping.

Martha then returned to the room where her mother sat, still waiting for the sound of a coming cab, but no wheels were heard rumbling over the pavement of the quiet Rue Férou.

"Two hours have gone by, mother," said Martha, in a faint voice, "and my presentiments—"

However, just then there came a loud ring at the door-bell, and Martha ceased speaking for a moment, and then exclaimed: "It is he!"

This cry escaped her while her mother opened the door. But the person standing on the landing was not in the least like Paul Vernier. "Excuse me, excuse me," said he, in the hoarse voice of a common street loafer, "it's here, ain't it, that M^{me} Mongis lives?"

The widow looked distrustfully at this strange visitor, who wore a ragged blouse and a dirty cap.

"I am Madame Mongis. What do you wish?" said she, curtly.

"I've come from a gent whose name's Paul Vernier—"

"What has happened to him, in Heaven's name?" exclaimed the young girl.

"Oh, nothing, my little lady, nothing but a broken leg. That's not much, and in a couple of months or so—"

"Where is he? I must see him!"

"He wants to see you, too," replied the frightful-looking scamp. "He sent me here to bring you to where they've taken him."

"Come, mother, let us go!" said Martha in a broken voice.

"We will go with you, sir," replied Madame Mongis who was greatly agitated. "Wait a moment, if you please."

"Oh, don't hurry; I can wait," growled the fellow, stepping into the dining-room.

While he was looking stealthily about him, the ladies darted into the adjoining apartment, and hurried through their preparations for departure. Baïa was still asleep, and Madame Mongis and Martha in their anxiety hurried off without stopping to kiss her, following the suspicious-looking messenger who had presented himself in the name of Paul Vernier.

The night was dark and the Rue Férou was not lighted up like the Palais Royal. Gas was but little in use in Paris, at that time, and almost everywhere the hanging lanterns of the eighteenth century had been retained. When the two women set foot upon the muddy pavement of the narrow street, where few people seldom passed after sunset, they felt somewhat afraid. Martha never went out at night at all and her mother whenever she was late at church took the precaution to ask an old messenger who stood at the corner of the Place Saint Sulpice to escort her.

Thus they repented for a moment of having ventured out on the strength of a stranger's word, and in his company, but the feeling which had led them to do so, soon got the better of their fright.

"Where are you taking us? Where is Monsieur Paul Vernier?" asked Madame Mongis.

"At a chemist's shop," replied the suspicious-looking messenger. "The chemist has already tied up his leg, and made him smell salts and other things to bring him to. Ah! he's all right, your young man!"

"Was it far from here that the accident happened?"

"Well, not very far, and not very near, either. It was over there, near the Barrière d'Enfer. I don't know the name of the street, but I shall know the house all right."

"How did he happen to injure himself?"

"Why, that's easy to understand; in jumping out of his cabriolet, he slipped and broke his leg you see!"

"For Heaven's sake, let us make haste!" exclaimed the widow.

However rough the manner of the man with the husky voice might be, Madame Mongis no longer felt any doubt as to the truth of the message he had brought. The mention of the cabriolet and the *Barrière d'Enfer* had silenced her last doubts. To those who knew Paul and his impetuous ways, it seemed only too credible that he might have broken a limb in hastily alighting from a high-set cabriolet. Besides, it seemed impossible for the guide to have invented the story of Paul's journey to the lonely *Barrière d'Enfer*; and the ladies therefore willingly followed him.

The man seemed to be in as great a hurry as Paul's friends were, for he strode along without seeming to care in the least whether they were fatigued or not. He had gone up the *Rue Férou* and turned to the right into the *Rue de Vaugirard*. This was, in fact, the proper way to the *Barrière*, and Madame Mongis did not feel the slightest suspicion. However she for a moment remembered the child whom she had left at home.

"Did you close the door carefully, Martha?" she asked rather by way of form than out of any real anxiety.

"Oh! don't be uneasy, mother; Baïa is asleep, and quite safe. Would to Heaven that Monsieur Paul ran no more risk than our dear little one!"

"Poor young man! all alone in Paris, without any relatives or friends!"

"We can take the place of his absent family," said the young girl at once.

"Certainly; but we must write to his mother."

Martha made no rejoinder. Without understanding her own feelings, she felt a kind of jealousy at the thought that she would not be the only person to take care of Paul.

The man with the blouse was walking a few paces ahead, and did not seem to notice what they were saying. He went on with his hands in his pockets, his cap pushed back, and his head up; but if Cambremer's neighbours had been able to see his face, they would certainly have noticed the restlessness of his eyes. Whenever they came to a corner, he looked in all directions, but without turning his head, as though he had been scarching in the dark for something or for someone.

The rain fell in a dreary drizzle—it was one of these fine rains such as fall in Paris in the winter, and which penetrate one to the very marrow of one's bones. The passers-by kept close to the houses, and hurried on as if anxious to be under shelter.

"We should do better to take a cab—we should go quicker," said Madame Mongis, when they reached the top of the *Rue d'Assas*.

"That's certain," growled the guide; "but in this cursed neighbourhood, and in such awful weather, cabs are difficult to find. Let us keep on, and perhaps we shall find one on the *Boulevard Mont Pernase*."

This name, which he so mispronounced, ought to have reminded the mother and daughter that they were no longer on the road to the *Barrière d'Enfer*. But they were too much taken up with their thoughts to pay any attention to the way which they were being taken. They reached the corner of the *Rue de Vaugirard*, at a point where it was crossed by a wide thoroughfare planted with old elms. The wind was blowing from the west, and bending the boughs; water streamed between the paving-stones,

and by the flicker of a single street-lamp, the puddles in the middle of the crossing were dimly visible.

"You can't cross this on foot, my little ladies," said the man, stepping somewhat aside. "I know a cab-stand not far off; just wait five minutes for me, and I'll bring you a trap."

Before Madame Mongis had time to reply, the fellow disappeared under the shadow of the tall trees. The sound of his heavy shoes tramping along in the mud was soon lost amid the howling of the wind.

"Suppose he shouldn't come back?" said Martha, going closer to her mother.

"What an idea! The man has every interest in going with us, and being paid for his trouble."

"I can't help it," replied the young girl; "but I feel as though he had some bad motive in bringing us here."

Madame Mongis endeavoured to reason with her daughter, but she was, in point of fact, no less alarmed herself. Moreover, their fears were not unfounded, for the five minutes passed by, and the scamp did not again make his appearance. The street was utterly deserted, the storm was increasing, and the two women found it impossible to remain where they were.

"That man's disappearance is incomprehensible," said Madame Mongis, after waiting for a quarter-of-an-hour. "I don't know what to do."

"But we can't desert Monsieur Paul," said Martha, who forgot her fright in thinking of the sufferings of the young fellow who had met with the accident.

"No, certainly not; but we cannot find him by remaining here in the street alone. I don't know in the least where we are, and the wisest course would be to go back and ask the way of the first person we meet. When once we reach the *Barrière d'Enfer*, we may find someone who knows of the accident, and will be able to tell us to what chemist's shop Monsieur Vernier was taken."

"Oh, yes, mother, I'm sure that someone will show us the way there," said the young girl, taking Madame Mongis's arm, and turning back towards the *Rue de Vaugirard*.

In this retired district, people go to bed at an early hour. There was scarcely a light to be seen in the windows of the houses. The shops were closed, and the silence was so profound, that it seemed as though they were in some country town where life ends with daylight.

"We sha'n't find anyone walking about in this frightful weather," exclaimed Madame Mongis, in a tone of discouragement.

"Oh! mother, I think I see a light!" exclaimed Martha, hurrying on.

A faint gleam, indeed, escaped from a doorway open on the street. The two women advanced, and on seeing that the light came from a shed, they went in—finding themselves precisely in the very shanty where Morillon kept his famous yellow cabriolet. If they could have guessed that chance had brought them to the only place where they could hear anything of Paul Vernier, they would not have long regretted their guide's unaccountable flight.

"Pierre, is that you?" asked a trembling voice. And, thereupon, Jacqueline rushed out to meet her husband, for whom she had been waiting for three long hours in a state of indescribable terror.

The candle which she held in her hand lit up her anxious face, and Madame Mongis was so much struck by the peculiar expression it bore,

that she for a moment forgot the purport of her coming, to inquire the cause of the woman's fright.

"Nothing, madame," stammered the housewife. "It's my man—he is a cab-driver, and I'm waiting for him. I thought it was him."

"We are looking for a cab."

"Oh! in that case, my good ladies, pray come in and warm yourselves for a moment. Pierre can't be long now; the Barrière d'Enfer isn't far off—"

"The Barrière d'Enfer!" repeated Madame Mongis, in surprise; "that is just where we want to go."

"That's strange! it seems as though everybody was going there to-night. My husband just took a young man there, the son of our old master, the deceased Monsieur Vernier, whom you may, p'raps, have heard of," said Jacqueline, with the simplicity which leads country folks to imagine that everybody knows everybody else.

"Monsieur Vernier? Paul Vernier?" asked Martha, in amazement.

"Why, yes, his name's Paul. I'm sure of that, for I was at his christening."

"Why, it's he whom we want to find. He has met with an accident in getting out of your husband's cabriolet."

"Good heavens! And where is he? But it isn't possible, for Pierre would bring him to me to take care of, poor, dear boy!"

This assertion was a revelation to Madame Mongis. She realised that it would be better to await the return of the driver than to run about the streets without knowing which way to go, and so she made up her mind to enter the room connected with the shed. Martha had the same idea, and thanked Heaven for guiding them so well.

"Ah! how glad I am to find friends of poor Madame Vernier!" said the worthy Jacqueline, poking the fire to make it burn up. "I'll wager that you came from the same part of the country?"

"No, my good woman, no; but we are very fond of Monsieur Paul."

"Warm yourself, my dear little lady; you are wet through, and you may take cold."

Martha was, indeed, trembling as much from cold as from excitement, and her mother made her sit down in front of the fire.

Suddenly, Jacqueline, who had knelt down to poke the fire, rose up, asking, in a voice faint with terror: "Did you hear that?"

Madame Mongis and her daughter looked at each other in astonishment. Jacqueline, with her pale face and haggard eyes, seemed as if she were insane, and, indeed, the ladies wondered for a moment whether she was in her right mind. However, on listening attentively, they distinguished a dull, prolonged sound. It resembled the rolling of a carriage, or the distant explosion of a mine.

"I think that I do hear some sounds which I cannot exactly account for," said Madame Mongis, "but why are you so much frightened, my good woman?"

"Ah! you don't know—"

"Well, what? Tell us what it is!" said the widow, impatiently,

"Why, this house is bewitched, you see, and every night it is the same way."

"What do you mean? I cannot understand you." And in repeating her question, Madame Mongis could not suppress a smile.

"When I say that the house is haunted, it is not this poor old shanty that I mean," said Jacqueline, lowering her voice.

"I don't understand."

"Well, madame, you must have noticed that we are in the court-yard of a house which is larger than the town hall at Saint Omer?"

"I thought that I saw a high house and a wide carriage entrance near the shed, but—"

"Well, that old building has been shut up for years; the roof is falling away by degrees and the shutters are rotting, the doors and windows are never opened, and no one ever goes into it, and yet—"

"Well?"

"There is a witches' revel held there every night when the sun sets."

"Come, my good woman," said Madame Mongis, "what is it that occurs there that is in any way unusual?"

"Oh! all sorts of things! Sometimes it seems as though some one was striking on an anvil, and then again, as though chains were being dragged about."

"But are you sure that you are not mistaken, and that these sounds don't come from the street or some work-shop in the neighbourhood?"

"No! No! I know what I'm saying; and the proof is that in our cellar you can hear the noises much better than here."

"This is strange," said Madame Mongis, who remembered having heard various old stories of coiners; "but are we not above the Catacombs just here?"

"I can't tell you, madame; but it's certain that the ground must be dug away, for there's a hollow sound everywhere."

"To whom does the house belong?"

"You ask me more than I can tell you. Pierre hired the shed and stand from an agent, and every three months he goes to Montrouge to pay him the rent. That's all I know about it."

"But the owner must be known round about here?"

"No more than I know the Sultan. The butcher at the corner, who has stayed here for fifteen years, says that the house belongs to an English nobleman who bought it when the Allies came here, but no one has ever seen a living soul go into it."

"Mother, time is passing," murmured Martha, who, in the midst of Jacqueline's stories, was still thinking of the sufferer.

"Your husband is very late in returning," said Madame Mongis, addressing the cabman's wife.

"If I only knew exactly where he'd gone," said Jacqueline, "I would go to find him rather than stay here and die of fright."

She had scarcely spoken when a fresh subterranean explosion was heard in the depths of the cellar. This time Martha also heard it. "It sounds like a gunshot," said her mother, very much startled.

"I told you that we had the devil under our feet," exclaimed Jacqueline, making the sign of the cross.

A long silence followed this strange manifestation of life in the lower regions. The good woman had instinctively fled into the shed, and was trembling in every limb. Martha began to be seriously alarmed and looked at her mother to induce her to go away; but Madame Mongis had succeeded in overcoming her first feeling of alarm, and she was reflecting calmly. As the widow of an officer, Cambremer's neighbour was little inclined to be superstitious, and she had a habit of going to the bottom of everything, and always remained firm when she found herself in a difficult position. She now said to herself that these alarming sounds must have a

natural cause, and she tried to divine the true one. An idea suddenly occurred to her.

"Will you take me to your cellar?" she asked, in a firm tone.

"To the cellar!" repeated Jacqueline, raising her hands to heaven; "what, you want us all to be destroyed?"

"If I thought that there was any real danger, my good woman, I wouldn't expose my daughter to it. But do as I tell you, and we shall find out what it all is without running any risk whatever."

"What are you going to do, mother?" asked the young girl, who was as much surprised as alarmed at the proposal.

Madame Mongis silently pressed her hand with a warning look.

"But Monsieur Vernier is waiting for us. Shouldn't we do better to go and look for him?"

"Not till I know whether what I think is true or not."

These words were spoken in a voice that did not admit of a reply; and Martha, who was habitually obedient to her mother, said no more.

"You might give me this shanty and the nobleman's house, besides, but I wouldn't take 'em. The whole place is full of witchcraft!" now exclaimed Jacqueline.

"Very well; give me that candle and show me the cellar-door. I will go down by myself."

Courage is as contagious as fear, and Pierre Morillon's wife felt quite ashamed when she saw a lady, whose servant she might well have been, displaying such courage.

"Well, now, really," said she, "if you think there's no danger—"

"Not the least, I assure you; and what is more, I promise you that all this shall be put a stop to, to-morrow, for I will complain to the authorities, and tell them whatever I hear."

"Oh! I don't rely on that at all, for I've been twice to the commissary's office, and I got laughed at as if I'd been a fool. But never mind, it sha'n't be said that I let a friend of Madame Vernier's run any risk on my account." Thereupon Jacqueline, taking up the candle, led the way, and Madame Mongis and her daughter followed.

In one corner of the Morillons' bed-room, the cellar was reached by a trap door, which the strong peasant-woman easily raised. They went down by a flight of ten steps, and were soon at the bottom. The place where they then found themselves had nothing outlandish or alarming about it. The walls were not bricked, nor was the ground paved, and there was no masonry vault above—nothing but the bedroom flooring. There were some axles, fellies, and pieces of harness lying about beside a high pile of bottles; while in one corner, somewhat sunk in the soil, there was an immense empty washtub.

Madame Mongis was engaged in reconnoitring the place, when a fresh explosion was heard almost under her feet. Jacqueline nearly swooned, and Martha seized hold of her mother's arm, but the brave widow did not stir. With her ears strained and her eyes fixed, she endeavoured to ascertain from what exact point the sound had proceeded. It was gradually diminishing as though it were dying away in some vast gallery. It was evident also to Madame Mongis that the soil below her feet could not be very thick, for a thick layer of earth deadens sound, whereas this noise had vibrated throughout the cellar.

After a short silence the least acute ear could distinguish a noise of blows dealt at unequal intervals. They undoubtedly sounded from under the

huge washtub towards which Madame Mongis went, walking cautiously, so as not to betray her presence in the cellar, in case the mysterious persons in the depths below should be listening to hear what was going on above. The open tub had nothing inside it, and its bottom could be seen trembling at each blow.

"It is the first time that I have heard these sounds so near," said Jacqueline. "The other nights they seemed to be thirty feet off."

"It seems as though there were some one trying to get into the cellar," whispered Martha in her mother's ear.

"For Heaven's sake let us go away, madame!" resumed the country-woman.

"Let us stay rather! Don't you realise that if these people who are in the vault below had any bad intentions, they wouldn't run the risk of entering the cellar of an inhabited house?"

"But how, in Heaven's name, can you be sure of that?" bawled Jacqueline, without caring whether those in the bowels of the earth below heard her or not; "such wretches might be capable of anything."

The housewife had already forgotten to accuse the devil of making this noise, but she was all the more frightened at the prospect of meeting some bandits in real flesh and blood.

"What if it should be some unfortunate fellow who is wandering about in the Catacombs and trying to get out," said the widow.

"But he would have died a hundred times over, madame, for I tell you that the noise has been going on for months and months," retorted Jacqueline.

This reasoning was certainly sound, as Madame Mongis admitted, and she was on the point of retiring when sounds quite of another kind reached her ear. "That is a cry for help!" she exclaimed.

Indeed, there was no mistaking the nature of the sound. It was a human voice calling from the depths of the abyss in utter despair.

"I was sure of it!" exclaimed Madame Mongis; "there is a man there under our feet, some man who is lost and deserted; he is near death, and is calling for help."

"That may be—may be true," muttered Jacqueline, half convinced.

"Oh, mother, how can we save him?" exclaimed Martha, clasping her hands.

The problem which the young girl propounded was by no means easy of solution. The cry of despair, like the noise which had previously been heard, came from below the tub placed in the corner of the cellar.

At what depth below was the unfortunate man wandering about, and what were the obstacles which separated him from those who wished to save him from a miserable death? To ascertain this, it would first be necessary to remove the tub which sealed up his tomb like a monumental marble pile.

"Help me!" cried Madame Mongis, who no longer restrained her voice. The appeal was effective, and Morillon's wife caught hold of the edges of the tub. But either it was too heavy, or was fastened down by some invisible means, at all events it did not stir.

"This is strange!" cried Jacqueline, who had entire confidence in her stout muscles; "there must be some spell upon the tub."

"Did you place it here?" asked Madame Mongis, who on her side had not spared her strength.

Martha also had lent the help of her delicate hands.

"I?" replied Morillon's wife; "why should I want such a big tub as that? When we hired this place we found it just as it is there."

"Then we must find out the secret of the door for there is one," said Madame Mongis, in a firm tone.

"Oh! I'll find it if what you say is true," rejoined the cabman's wife, kneeling down beside the tub, and feeling it inside.

The cry for help had not been repeated, and, in fact, no more noise came from below. "We have arrived too late!" muttered the courageous widow.

"Ah! I have found it!" at this moment shouted Jacqueline, triumphantly. And hastily rising up, she showed Madame Mongis that a part of the wood-work forming the bottom of the tub could be raised up by means of an iron ring secured in the centre. The light of the candle which Martha held was now turned upon the tub, and in an instant Jacqueline had seized hold of the ring and pulled out the bottom of the tub. The soil below, thus uncovered, did not appear to have been disturbed for a long time, for it was like the rest of the ground in the cellar. However, if the searchers had retained any doubts as to the importance of their discovery they would have renounced them, for the same voice as before now fell upon their ears as if uttering a final appeal. "Help! Come to me; help!" called some unfortunate being buried below.

The difficult matter was to reach him. However slight a layer of soil may be, it cannot be dug into with one's nails, and yet in this instance it was necessary to remove it as soon as possible. Jacqueline made but one bound to the opposite end of the cellar, and returned with an iron bar which had formerly done duty in supporting the yellow cabriolet. "Let me try," said she, after spitting upon her hands. "You'll see how people dig in our part of the country."

The worthy peasant-woman did not boast amiss, for she began to work with a skill and vigour which the best pioneer might have envied. The pointed iron worked well when driven with a will into the hardened ground, and the soil flew about in every direction like sand under Jacqueline's vigorous efforts. The mother and daughter watched the progress of her toil with very natural anxiety. The emotion consequent upon the discovery which Madame Mongis had thus made, had caused them to forget the friends respecting whom they had felt so worried a little time before. Cambremer, who had disappeared, and Paul Vernier, who had broken his leg, left their minds for an instant, in presence of the painful reality: there was a man buried under ground, whom only a miracle could save.

The noise from below had ceased, but suddenly there came the clear, sharp sound of the iron bar striking upon stone. This was incontestable proof that some success had rewarded the efforts made by Jacqueline, but it remained to be seen what this fresh obstacle meant. "Courage, we are coming near!" exclaimed Madame Mongis.

Indeed, two or three more blows with the iron bar completely uncovered a broad flag-stone.

"Hold the light; let me try to find a joining," said the peasant-woman.

Martha hastily held out the candle, and her mother who was leaning against the tub, pointed almost at once to a kind of mortise which seemed to have been long since cut in the stone. "You now only need to raise the slab," said she, with indescribable emotion.

"That won't take long," rejoined Jacqueline, raising the bar so as to use it as a lever.

None of the three women who had so bravely devoted themselves to this arduous task thought of any danger. The only thing that made their hearts beat fast was the fear that they were perhaps too late to save the man who had been buried in the depth below. "It is coming up!" suddenly exclaimed the emergent peasant-woman. And, indeed, the flag-stone was so thin that it had easily yielded to the lever. It was slowly rising, and as soon as it was almost upright, Jacqueline, throwing down her instrument, seized hold of it with both hands and turned it over.

A dark, yawning hole was seen; at the same time, a puff of damp air almost blew out the light. The silence was profound, for the man who had just before called out was now silent, and his deliverers were too much agitated to speak. They held their breath for fear of missing the slightest indication of his presence. But not the faintest sound was audible.

There was a way to end this uncertainty. It was to carry the light to the hole, to explore the depths, and even descend into them if it seemed possible to do so. But darkness has its terrors, and the women who had braved the danger of finding themselves face to face with some robber now hesitated at the thought of daring the mysteries of the yawning abyss. Jacqueline, who was standing upright in the tub, represented the vanguard of the expedition, and the dangerous honour of going first fell upon her. She made no haste, it must be confessed, and Madame Mongis did not venture to urge her. As for Martha, pale and trembling, she had drawn back a few steps when the stone had been raised, and now waited anxiously for what was to follow.

At last Morillon's wife made up her mind to imitate the devotion of Curtius, the heroic Roman who voluntarily precipitated himself into a yawning chasm to save his country. She took the light, knelt down, and then cautiously protruded her head.

However, at the moment when she bent over the aperture, holding up the light, a man suddenly appeared from below with a pistol in each hand.

Jacqueline drew back with a cry of fright, and there was good reason for her doing so. The fellow, who thus appeared like a "jack in the box," was only partly visible, for the lower part of his body remained below the aperture, but his face was as black as charcoal, and he turned his threatening pistols full in the faces of the women.

The first words that came from his diabolical-looking mouth were certainly far from encouraging. "Don't stir, or I'll blow your brains out!" howled this ferocious personage.

The terrified peasant-woman remained prostrate at his feet, and groaned in the most piteous manner, without even daring to raise her eyes. On the other hand, by one of those instinctive movements, such as are prompted by a mother's heart, Madame Mongis had thrown herself before Martha to shield her. In the first moment of surprise and terror she did not understand with whom she had to deal; still she expected to be shot down, and feeling resigned to death, she only thought of saving her daughter.

But the situation changed with the rapidity of a transformation scene at a theatre, where the machinery works well. The light had not fallen from Jacqueline's hand, and the man could distinguish the features of the two women who were clinging together. Then they suddenly saw him lower his pistols and leap out of the hole, exclaiming: "Our neighbours!"

This voice from the grave startled Madame Mongis, and she had the courage to take a step forward to examine the strange apparition a little more closely.

"It is I. Don't you know me?" asked the fellow.

"Who are you?" said the widow, who thought she must be dreaming.

"Courapied, of course, or Cassonade, if you like that better."

"What, is it possible?"

"It is; and you had a famous idea in coming here, though I can't imagine how you found us."

"It was Heaven that led us here; but you—what horrible adventure can have led you into that vault?"

"I will tell you by-and-bye; for the present, the most urgent thing is to take my master out of this infernal cellar."

"Monsieur Cambremer? Is he there—alive?" asked Madame Mongis, in agitation.

"Alive, yes; but he is hurt and almost dying. Ah, madame, how glad I am to see your face again."

Jacqueline had gradually collected sufficient courage to raise herself up, and she was listening to this conversation with a bewildered air. They might have been speaking Hebrew for all that she could understand of the strange recognition between the ladies and the man from the vault.

"Now my cellar-rat can be utilized!" exclaimed Cassonade, joyously taking the roll of stearine from his pocket and lighting it at the housewife's candle. "Stay beside the hole, my good woman, and hold the light for me while I go down to look for my party," he added.

"So we shall see Monsieur Cambremer again," said Madame Mongis; "I had almost given up all hope!"

"But we have not found Monsieur Paul," remarked the young girl in a low tone.

The faithful squire disappeared into the depths again, and, thanks to Jacqueline, who did as he had requested in reference to lighting him, they could all see the highest step of a flight some three feet below. Then, after a few minutes of anxious waiting, Cassonade appeared.

Once more the chevalier was coming up behind him, but only with great difficulty, and he required the help of the hands which both of the ladies extended.

They were shedding tears of joy, and Martha could not help throwing her arms about Cambremer's neck, but he uttered a cry of pain. "You are hurt, then!" exclaimed the young girl.

"Yes, it is my shoulder," replied the chevalier in a faint voice, "but no matter, since I see you again."

"It is a miracle, and I thank Heaven for it!" murmured Madame Mongis.

Cambremer looked at her with feverish eyes, and many questions rose to his lips. "And how is Baïa?" he finally asked, pronouncing the little girl's name with evident hesitation, as though he were afraid of hearing some bad news.

"Our dear child is well, thank Heaven!" at once replied the widow, guessing the chevalier's anxiety.

"I kissed her before we came away," answered Martha. "She was asleep, and she was no doubt dreaming of you, for she spoke your name."

Cambremer drew a long breath. It was easy to see that he felt a heavy weight lifted off his mind.

"Well, sir," now said Cassonade, "I don't know where we are, but I think that if we could have a crust of bread and a glass of wine, we should be none the worse of it. Do you know that we haven't had a bite since—

since yesterday, I suppose, for I can't guess how long we stopped down there."

"Oh, my good gentlemen, I shall be only too glad to serve you," replied Jacqueline. "Come upstairs, there are the remains of my husband's supper there."

"Then you must lay three plates, my good woman, for there's a friend with us, an exciseman, who is half-dead of cold and hunger, and I must go and bring him up."

After this announcement, which brought the women's surprise to a climax, the indefatigable Cassonade made a second plunge into the vault.

Cambremer, leaning on the arm of Madame Mongis, then went up to Madame Morillon's rooms. Jacqueline, before leaving the cellar, provided herself with two bottles covered with cobwebs—a sure sign that the tipples they contained was something worth drinking; the table was laid once more, and then the chevalier seated himself. While he was drinking the old wine which Martha poured out for him, Cassonade in his turn came up through the trap-door, bringing, or rather carrying the exciseman, who could scarcely hold himself up. However, the sight of the bumpers poured out by Jacqueline brightened his weary face, and like Cassonade and Cambremer, he eagerly swallowed a draught of Morillon's old wine.

"Upon my word, I feared that I should never take another drink like this one!" said the squire, with a sigh of satisfaction; "there was nothing but brandy in the barrels which we found in that cursed cellar. Still for all that I thought for a moment of drinking it so as to stupefy myself, for we all believed that we were buried for good and all."

"If it hadn't been for you, my friend, if it hadn't been for you," rejoined Cambremer, "we should have died a miserable death in the vault into which that scoundrel Biroulas cast us."

"Ah! my presentiments proved true, then? I told you that I dreaded your making that fatal attempt," said Madame Mongis.

"That's true; it was a good thing that I kept near the stairs," resumed Cassonade, "and my idea of firing the pistols from time to time wasn't bad by any means. I'll wager that it was the noise of my firing that you heard here!" said he turning to the three women.

"That was what first attracted our attention," replied Martha, "and then we thought we heard someone knocking under the floor."

"That was the butt of my pistol, of course."

"And then we heard your cries."

"Oh, I heard you working to let us out, and I wanted to encourage you to keep on."

"But then we could not distinguish another sound, and the silence froze my blood."

"If I had only known who it was I shouldn't have kept so quiet," replied Cassonade, "but I said to myself: 'It is, perhaps, Biroulas's gang coming to kill us!' By keeping quiet and hiding at the foot of the stairs, I had a chance of potting the fellows one after another. Afterwards, when you had raised the stone and I saw that no one came down, I thought it would be better to risk coming up."

"And you almost frightened us to death," remarked Madame Mongis.

"But, my good sir," now asked Jacqueline, "how have you managed to live for the six months and more that I have heard you making a noise like a witch's Sabbath in that villainous den?"

"Six months? what an idea! we fell into the vault this morning, and we had quite enough of it as it was, I can tell you!"

"The noises that you previously heard, madame," now said Cambremer, "were made by some smugglers, whose leader we wanted to capture. The vault must have another exit, which we could not see in the darkness."

"Oh, yes, in that old house at the end of the courtyard!" exclaimed Jacqueline.

"And the entrance which we so fortunately found must have been closed up for a long time," remarked Madame Mongis. "Everything indicates that it formerly served, however, and that it was purposely hidden by placing that wash-tub over it and securing the tub in the ground."

"To-morrow," said Cambremer, angrily, "yes, to-morrow we will break into the scoundrel's den."

"To-morrow, sir," said Cassonade, quietly, "I shall go for a doctor to set your shoulder, and to-night—but see, you are turning pale already, why, you are fainting!"

This was true. Cambremer's strength had given out, and despite all his courage, it was urgent that he should take a rest. Madame Mongis endorsed the opinion given by the squire, who, after so many disasters, still retained his good humour and good sense. "Come and see our dear little girl," said she to Cambremer, who, on recollecting his young charge, decided to return to the Rue Férou.

"Mother, you say nothing of Monsieur Paul," whispered Martha in Madame Mongis's ear.

But a maternal glance informed the young girl that her friend had not been forgotten. The fact is, the widow thought it useless to increase the chevalier's bodily torture and moral worry by telling him of the accident which had befallen Paul Vernier, so she whispered some instructions to Jacqueline, begging her to send her husband to them as soon as he returned, to let them know all about the young man.

Comforted by Morillon's wine, and happy to find himself still alive, the exciseman took leave of his companions in peril and started for the *Barrière d'Enfer* not, however, without having stated where and how he could be found on the morrow.

Jacqueline then showed out the persons whom such a strange combination of circumstances had sent to her abode, bade them an affectionate farewell, and returned indoors grumbling about her husband's continued absence. The chevalier, his squire, and his two neighbours then repaired in company to the Rue Férou.

The little group of friends, happy at finding themselves together again, but grieved at the failure of the first attack upon the scoundrel, Biroulas, reached the house where they resided without any further adventure. The street door was open, in spite of the lateness of the hour, and Cassonade began to deplore the carelessness of the tenant who had neglected to shut it.

"Will you allow us to go up to your rooms to kiss Baïa?" asked Cambremer of Madame Mongis.

The latter consented with great pleasure, and they mounted the two flights of stairs as fast as the chevalier's condition would admit of. "Good heavens!" exclaimed Martha, as she reached the landing, "our lock has been forced open!"

This was the first warning that something unpleasant had happened. When a misfortune is in the air, when those whom it may fall upon have

for an instant forgotten that a catastrophe threatens them, the slightest accident suffices to remind them of the dangers of the situation. This lock had surely not been broken without a motive, and Madame Mongis at once thought of the only treasure of which she could be despoiled.

"Baïa !" she exclaimed, rushing into the dining-room, where there still burnt a light, which, in her hurry, she had forgotten to extinguish.

Cambremer, fearfully alarmed by her cry of anguish, pushed the faithful Cassonade aside, and darted after her. However, Martha, with the agility of youth, had reached the bedroom before either of them, and in an instant she reached to the bed usually occupied by her adopted sister. "They have stolen her !" she cried, in a voice husky with emotion.

It was only too true, and her mother, who almost immediately afterwards reached the scene of the audacious abduction, saw with despair that the child was gone. "It is my fault !" she murmured, striking her forehead with despair.

The light which she held in her hand lit up the empty room, but there was nothing to show that a crime had been committed. The little bed was scarcely disturbed ; the pictures with which Baïa had been playing before going to sleep were still scattered over the coverlet ; a glass of water upon a side-table had not even been overturned. Cambremer could not believe his eyes ; for he was absolutely ignorant of all that had taken place in his absence.

"But it is impossible that she can have gone away alone !" he exclaimed. "Still, perhaps she awoke in a childish fright, and may have called for her mother, as she did on the night when Cassonade put her to bed in the blue-room. Not finding anyone near her, she got up—"

"Ah !" said Martha, "if she were anywhere here she would have already flung her arms around my neck !"

"You do not know everything, Monsieur Cambremer, you do not know everything !" repeated Madame Mongis, in despair.

This unintelligible scene might have lasted much longer had not Cassonade, with his customary good sense, remarked to the widow : "I will venture to say that you were drawn away from home on some pretext or other—probably to run after the chevalier, who had not returned ?"

"No, the man who came here spoke of Monsieur Paul Vernier. He said that he had broken his leg, and that he wanted us to come to him."

"The man ! What man ?"

"A shabby-looking man in ragged clothes."

"And did you go with him ?"

"Well, could we abandon Monsieur Paul when he had met with an accident, and might be dying—leave him to be treated by indifferent people, who had, perhaps, picked him up when he fell in the street ?" asked the young girl, in a firm tone.

"But, mademoiselle," rejoined the judicious Cassonade, "how could you believe that Monsieur Paul, who seems so well-bred, would have chosen such a messenger ?"

"After so serious an accident, and in a neighbourhood where he knew no one, he would naturally avail himself of anybody's services," stammered Martha, who was heartily beginning to repent of her credulity.

"He would at least have written a line. I'll venture to say that Monsieur Vernier is as well as we are !"

"But, then, he would have returned," said Madame Mongis.

"No, he will not return," declared the chevalier, becoming greatly excited as he began to realise the dark plot woven to deceive all the protectors of the little girl, "he will not return, for they have killed him as they tried to kill me, and—"

He stopped short, however, on seeing the young girl turn frightfully pale and catch at a chair, in order to sustain herself.

"Oh, come now!" said Cassonade hastily, "they don't need to resort to murder, the scoundrels! All that they wished to do was to get the ladies out of the way, in order that they themselves might do what they wanted."

"Besides," said Madame Mongis, "they couldn't have known that the young fellow would come here, or that we should send him to look for Monsieur Cambremer."

"They must have known it, mother, as they made use of his name," said Martha in a trembling voice.

Cassonade could find no reply to an objection dictated by that instinct of the heart which never deceives women. All his faculties were at work striving to penetrate the mysterious circumstances which had attended the abduction of the child. The ex-grocer was not destitute of good sense and sagacity, although he had previously applied all his thoughts to purchasing molasses and selling raisins. His strong frame, moreover, was proof against the most trying adventures, and he had come out of Biroulas's cellar with every faculty unimpaired.

"No matter!" said he, after thinking for a moment, "I feel sure that we shall soon see Monsieur Paul again."

"Heaven grant it!" sighed Martha.

"And, besides, I am sure that it wasn't that ragged scamp who carried the little girl away."

"He left us on the Boulevard Mont-Parnasse," said Madame Mongis, "and he had abundant time to return here while we were with that worthy woman—"

"I don't say the contrary; but if it was he who forced the lock—a thing which I doubt—he can't have worked alone when once the door was opened."

"Why not?" asked Cambremer.

"Well, you see that there is nothing disturbed here. The furniture is in its place, the blankets are undisturbed, and the light has remained where you left it."

"Well?"

"Well, don't you understand that the little girl, at the mere sight of the robber's face, would have screamed so loudly that all the people in the house would have been aroused?"

"True," said Martha, "she only knew us, and she was afraid of strangers."

"Good! then if the man you speak of had tried to touch her, she would have resisted, would she not? She would have run about the room endeavouring to escape?"

"Yes; but the poor child's resistance could not last long."

"Long or not, there would be some trace of it. The more I look about, the more positive I am of what I say."

"What do you conclude, then?" asked Cambremer impatiently.

"I conclude that the little one went away willingly with some one whom she knew, and whom she was not afraid of."

This simple idea had not yet occurred to any one, but it now seemed to strike everybody as correct.

"However," said Madame Mongis, after a pause, "you forget that to induce Baïa to go away, it would have been necessary to speak to her in her own language."

"I know that very well, and that is precisely what was done."

"But who did it?"

"I have my own opinions as to that."

"Good heavens! explain yourself," exclaimed the chevalier.

"Well, so skilfully managed a trick must have been played by a woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes; the woman who has been prowling round about us ever since that evening at the Odéon—the one whom my master followed to Frascati's when she was dressed in male attire, and who resumed her own feminine raiment to spy upon us on the day of the funeral at the church and at the cemetery."

"It would be strange—"

"That may be, but I see no other explanation. You saw for yourself that on the night of the crime she knew the man with the beard who was in the box, for she made signs to him, and no doubt she understands the little one's gibberish."

"But Baïa must have a horror of that abominable woman?"

"Why so? The child may not know that this woman is the accomplice of the scoundrel who tried to bury us alive to-day. Who knows whether the adventuress didn't make her believe that she had come to take her to her mother, for we are not sure that the little one knows that her mother is dead."

"That is true," said Madame Mongis.

"However," exclaimed Cambremer, "since the murderer of the stage-box voluntarily abandoned Baïa, how can you suppose that he was anxious to get hold of her again?"

"Oh, sir," replied Cassonade, "it does not require much cunning to guess his reasons. When he took her with him on leaving the theatre, he did not think that in the meantime you were running after the woman who was disguised as a man, and he had still less idea that I, Jacques Courapié, would be passing along the Rue Férou just in time to find the little girl."

"But he must have supposed that some one would find her."

"He at first supposed that she would perish of cold, or perhaps he thought that if, by any chance, she was found, she would be taken to a police-station and thence to some pauper-asylum. He had no anxiety as to the results of his rascality."

This reasoning was indeed plausible, and Cambremer listened to it with the utmost attention.

"You see that everything is now changed," resumed Cassonade. "This scoundrel knows perfectly well that the child fell into the hands of persons who would not let her depend upon public charity, and he also knows that you have threatened to avenge her. That is why he determined to get her back again."

"Yes, yes, all seems very clear in that way."

"Of course it does! He thought that we were caught in his cellar like rats in a trap, he knew that the ladies were out, and that Baïa was alone

in the room. So he sent the woman who no doubt picked the lock and then coaxed the child away."

"And what will he do now?" asked Martha, who was so agitated that she had forgotten Paul Vernier.

Cassonade at first made no reply, but it was evident that he did not dare to say what he thought. "Everything is to be feared," he murmured at last.

These words made the women shudder and threw the chevalier into a violent rage. "The scoundrels!" he cried, shaking his fist at his absent enemies; "I will find them again! I must find them, and I will spend my last remaining strength—"

Cambremer could not finish his phrase, the movements which he had made caused him such acute pain that he turned pale and was obliged to sit down. His neighbours and his faithful squire hastened up to him.

"Spare yourself for her sake!" now said Madame Mongis.

"And for his!" added the young girl, who was thinking of the other sufferer.

"But who could have told them all this? Who can have thus betrayed us?" muttered the chevalier. "Everything is becoming more and more incomprehensible."

X.

WHICH DESCRIBES HOW WINDOWS MAY BE UTILISED WHEN THEY OVERLOOK WASTE GROUND.

PAUL VERNIER, in the room where he was confined, had had plenty of time to get chilled to the marrow of his bones by the time he heard midnight striking. It was not so much from the cold and the darkness that he suffered as from the thought of the anxiety which his prolonged absence would unfailingly cause both Madame Mongis and her daughter.

He understood absolutely nothing of what had happened to him, and thought himself the victim of some mistake on the part of the excise officials. Still, the strange disappearance of Cambremer and Cassonade greatly puzzled him. He did not, of course, give a thought to the accusation against them as having any foundation; but he realised that Biroulas's house must be a dangerous trap, and that his friends must have fallen into an ambush. There was one circumstance which greatly increased his anxiety. The presence of the woman from Frascati's in that distant neighbourhood was significant, and the story told by Morillon the cabman left no doubt as to the participation of this evil creature in the plot so treacherously laid. Thus Paul's imprisonment proved intolerable torture. Each hour that passed by brought increased exasperation, and he kept on thinking of all the events of the evening without being able to reconcile so many contradictory facts. Walking up and down in his cell like a bear in his cage, he went from the door to the window and from the window to the door, cursing the thought which had led him to question the excisemen, and above all devoting to the infernal gods the over-zealous official who had thus seen fit to lock him up.

The results of the adventure did not alarm him much, for it was evident that on the morrow the doubtful story would be made clear, and that he

would be restored to liberty. But the night, the long February night, would give Cambremer's enemies time to finish their work of iniquity, and that thought alone drove Paul to frenzy.

The young fellow felt an affection mingled almost with veneration for the chevalier, and, besides, he sincerely loved Martha. In the heart of this young man of twenty impressions proved deep, and he defended those he loved with the same ardour that he showed as regards gambling. Since Cambremer had saved him from despair and dishonour, the sense of moral duty had prevailed in his mind above all others, and he had seldom felt any temptation to indulge again in the horrible vice which he had inherited from his father. He was not, however, radically cured, and he felt that he might sin again if the occasion offered. The fact that he was aware of this contributed to urge him along the right path which he had already taken in trying to further his friends' purposes. He instinctively sought danger and excitement in order to drive off evil thoughts.

"No!" he suddenly cried, stamping his foot, "it shall not be said that I waited here all night, while Madame Mongis and her daughter were dying of grief and anxiety." And thereupon he began to examine the place in which he was confined.

It was more a closet than a room, and it contained nothing but a few shelves, one above another, on which was piled a large collection of bound ledgers. The purpose it served—that of a storeroom for the registers of the excise office—did not make any formidable arrangements as regards security necessary. The door was closed by means of a simple lock, without any of the bolts such as are used in police-stations. Still, all escape was impossible by the doorway; for even supposing that Paul succeeded in forcing this primitive lock, he would have gone, as the saying runs, straight in the wolf's mouth. He very well remembered that the closet communicated with a long passage ending in a staircase which led direct to the post where the excisemen were stationed. He, therefore, turned his attention to the only window in the room.

He had approached it several times already, and had guessed that it must be at some height from the ground. But the darkness had prevented him from seeing how high it really was. Fortunately at the moment when he finally resolved to escape, the moon peered forth from behind a cloud. However, it was on the wane, and its crescent gave barely enough light to enable him to measure the distance he would have to clear. This seemed to be about twenty feet, and there was no grating to prevent him from taking the perilous leap.

The question was, whether the window was fastened up; for, if it proved necessary to break a pane, the noise might attract the guard. However, on carefully feeling about, Paul found the catch which he had no difficulty in turning. Moreover, he succeeded in doing so without making the slightest noise. Latude himself could not have been more dexterous, and Martha's lover had at once proved himself an adept in the art of making an escape.

After waiting for an instant, in order to make sure that no one was astir below, he popped out his head and looked about him. The result of his examination was far from encouraging. The window was almost at the height of an ordinary first floor, and the ground, although wet with the rain, did not appear to offer a very soft surface to alight upon, if the bold attempt were made. However, on looking more attentively, Paul thought that he caught sight of a heap of sand which might make the fall easier.

There was no choice, and so he did not hesitate. He climbed upon the window-sill, calculated the distance once more, and then—not without a last thought of Martha—leaped out in conformity to the best rules in gymnastics, that is to say, with his body quite straight and his knees somewhat bent.

The shock, on touching the ground, was severe, but youth has elastic limbs, and Paul escaped without any serious injury. In fact, he merely slightly bruised his hands and knees. For a moment he felt giddy, and was only able to rise up with difficulty. He had fallen into an inclosure, with a railing round it, which adjoined the excise office. In such bad weather, however, this place was always deserted, and the watchfulness of the officers was, moreover, concentrated upon the Barrière.

Paul was therefore able to cross this empty space without encountering any one. As to the railing which had to be climbed before he was at full liberty, that was a trifle for such an agile leaper. Paul Vernier climbed it without the least trouble, and met with no misadventure excepting a tear in his coat. He would not stop for such a trifle, and as soon as he set foot upon the pavement free to all Paris, he began to run straight on. The first thing was to escape the reach of the formidable excise officials.

After ten minutes' quick running, the young fellow stopped. He now had to make up his mind, and the best plan seemed to be to return at once to the Rue Férou. He must be awaited there with great impatience, and, indeed, if he had listened to his own wishes, he would at once have taken the road to Madame Mongis's rooms. But he did not know his way; being fresh to Paris, he had seen but little of this peculiar neighbourhood.

The chance direction he had taken had brought him to a lonely boulevard bordered by lofty trees and very badly lighted. Whatever lovers may say to the contrary, the heart is of no use as a compass, and Martha's admirer found himself in great perplexity and doubt as to how to reach the Quartier Saint Sulpice. He felt some remorse too in giving up his original purpose so soon, and the thought of appearing before Cambremer's neighbours without being able to give them any news of the chevalier was extremely repugnant to him. To tell the young girl about his adventures which had ended by imprisonment in the excise office, and to return from his expedition merely with a few scratches as proof of his willingness to obey her, was not a very tempting prospect.

He would have greatly preferred to prosecute his search as far as Biroulas's house where his friends had disappeared, but without the help of Morillon, the cabman, this enterprise seemed altogether impossible. Morillon alone, could guide him through the neighbourhood, and at that moment, Jacqueline's husband was still confined in the fiscal prison.

While Paul Vernier was thus deliberating and leaning against an old elm-tree he saw a woman and a child going across the roadway. Before he could reach them, the pair were on the opposite side-walk and they went on without even seeing him.

The little girl was chattering away, and the woman, who seemed to be her mother, was replying in the same manner. Both spoke a foreign tongue, and the strange notion occurred to Paul, that it was not the first time that he had heard this language. "What if it should be Baïa?" thought he, without pausing to consider how impossible such a supposition seemed. And, with his usual impulsiveness, he began to follow the walkers, who were going on very fast.

His first thought was to speak to the woman, but he gave up the idea on seeing her turn towards one of the city gates at the end of a street running out of the boulevard. So he contented himself with keeping his distance, and a moment later he passed through the same gateway as the mother and the child, and went on dogging their steps.

They had now turned to the left, and so far as Paul could judge, they were going in the direction of the *Barrière d'Enfer*, only on the outer side of the city wall. His suspicions were being justified. What with the wind and the rain combined, the sound of his footsteps was effectually deadened, and after a quarter of an hour's hurried walking, he saw the pair cross a wide road and turn in the direction of a lonely house. Five minutes later, the phantoms which fled before him had vanished.

Then he began to run, and in a breathless condition he reached a large entrance which had just been closed. Behind this door there was some one speaking, and this time it was in French.

"Now, I shall know what it all means," said Paul to himself.

"Are you sure that she doesn't understand us?" said a man's voice.

"Quite sure," replied a woman; "she has only had time to learn a few words of French since the women in the *Rue Férou* picked her up."

"Well, tell me quickly what happened over there."

"Everything happened as it ought to have happened. The fools ran into the trap, and they must now be plunging about in the mud on the *Boulevard Mont Parnasse*. I had a false key of the street door, and a skeleton key to pick the lock of the widow's rooms. In less than three minutes the trick was played."

"And didn't the little idiot cry out when she saw you?"

"Oh, I didn't give her time to do that. I told her the whole story, all at once. I said that her mother had been looking for her everywhere for two weeks past, and had sent me to take her to her at once. She swallowed all my falsehood like honey, and jumped out of bed, begging to go away with me at once."

Paul, hidden behind the door, did not lose a syllable of this edifying dialogue, and he had already heard enough to know that he had guessed correctly. If he had retained the slightest doubt, the childish voice which now mingled in the conversation, would have reassured him. He at once recognised *Baïa's* voice. The little girl was speaking in the unknown tongue which had so often fallen upon the ears of her protectors, and from its sound of entreaty, it was easy to guess that she was asking to see her mother again. The man spoke a few rough words to her, and then he again began talking to his worthy companion.

"You are sure that no one followed you?" he asked.

"No one. It is dreadful weather, and there is nobody about the streets."

"No matter. We must make haste and finish the business."

"What are you going to do with the little hussy?"

"You ask me that?"

"Yes, for I can't understand you now: you haven't been the same for the past two weeks. I should really like to know why you didn't wring her neck when you got rid of her mother."

"I had my reasons; but you may make yourself easy; she will lose nothing for having waited till now."

"Well it's no business of mine, but you will burden yourself with a

fine crime by killing her here, and, besides, the body will be found, and the police will come and there will be an investigation, and all that sort of thing; and as there has been a description given of me, I shall be compromised, while no one will think of suspecting the good Monsieur—

“Hold your tongue!” exclaimed the man, in a rough voice.”

On hearing this terrible plot, Paul had felt inclined to push open the door which separated him from the miscreants. However, he had the presence of mind to restrain himself, not that he hesitated to risk his life for Baïa’s sake, but because he hoped to learn something more about these mysterious persons.

“Do you think that I am fool enough to burden myself with a dead body?” asked the man.

“What do you mean to do then?”

“Well, the trap wasn’t made for dogs.”

“What! are you going to throw her also into the vault?”

“It seems to me that the plan succeeded very well this morning.”

“But what about those two fools who are already in the vault?”

“Well, what of them? She’ll keep them company, that’s all!”

A spell of silence followed upon this frightful colloquy. The murderer’s infamous accomplice was probably reflecting upon the chances of impunity which were offered by the suggested plan. As for Paul Vernier, his hair rose upon his head, and he was only waiting for a chance to throw himself upon the wretches who were thus calmly deliberating as to how they should rid themselves of their victim; however, he was sufficiently collected to realise that a sudden movement or too quick a cry, would compromise Baïa’s safety. The man must be armed, and it would be easy for him to stab the child at the first alarm.

“Do you know,” suddenly said the woman, “that I’m not over confident as regards the vault.”

“What could be better? Twenty-five feet deep, half a league long, and a huge stone as a door, at the other end?”

“Yes, yes; it’s complete; but you know very well that the excisemen are watching us. They came twice this morning to prowl about the house, and I only had just time enough to get away.”

“That’s another reason why they shouldn’t return to-night.”

“At all events, we shall do as well to make haste.”

Baïa was now heard, speaking in a timid and trembling tone. She was evidently entreating, and Paul clearly distinguished a word which he had often heard the child utter at Madame Mongis’s. “Imma, Imma!” said the poor little orphan.

The woman replied with affected mildness, and the insistence of the little girl no doubt influenced her determination, for she curtly said to the man: “How shall we set about it?”

“You closed the trap-door this morning, didn’t you?” was the rejoinder.

“Yes, and I was nearly caught by a fool of an exciseman who followed the others; in fact, I’m not sure but what he fell through in his turn while I was hidden behind the house.”

“I don’t care about that. I’ll tell you what we’ll do. I’ll go ahead and arrange the trap. While I’m preparing everything over there, you must keep the child quiet by telling her that I have gone to let her mother know that she is coming; then as soon as the trap is ready I will call you, and you must come at once.”

“Agreed! I’ll make the little girl go first down the passage; you must

call out to her that her mother is waiting for her ; she will run to kiss her, and then, crack ! down she'll go under the stage, like the devil in Fontan's play."

This horrible remark was punctuated by a burst of laughter which froze the blood in Paul's veins ; but at the same moment a thought flashed through his brain. He said to himself that the man was about to go away, and that Baïa would remain alone with the woman. That would evidently be the moment for action, and the chances of any misfortune to the child would be greatly lessened, if he, Paul, profited by the scoundrel's absence to snatch her away. There was, on the other hand, a chance that he might return to help the woman, who would not fail to call out to him, if she were suddenly attacked. It was also true, however, that the noise of a struggle and an outcry might attract attention if anyone were passing in the lonely neighbourhood. Paul weighed all these contingencies in his own mind, and his heart throbbed as though it would burst.

"Well, then, I'm off now," said the man. "Keep your eyes about you when you are alone, and be ready to come when I give the signal."

"Don't be afraid. I'm as anxious as you are to get through with it all, and I don't care to be arrested."

The sound of the miscreant's footsteps crossing the courtyard apprized Paul of the fact that the dread business was approaching. He was about to spring forward when he thought that he heard some distant voices. He listened with pardonable anxiety, for the arrival of reinforcements, whatever they might be, would suffice to deliver Baïa. The question was to ascertain whether the persons speaking were approaching Biroulas's house, and whether they would come up before the fatal summons resounded from the passage.

On listening attentively, Paul realised that there must be several persons, and that they were coming near, slowly, it is true, but all the same surely. However, they were still far enough away for the murder to be perpetrated ten times over before they arrived. The young fellow's perplexity was such that he trembled in every limb, but not with fear.

Conversation had begun again between Baïa and the woman who was keeping guard over her. It was still in the unknown tongue—the only one that the girl was able to speak. Evidently the woman was obeying the orders of her accomplice, and telling falsehoods to the child. To Paul's great astonishment, Baïa replied with unusual animation. She seemed to be making various objections to the false and perfidious statements of her female jailer.

"If she resists she is lost, for that man will return to kill her," thought Paul, in dismay.

Meantime the approaching voices were growing more and more distinct. This was satisfactory in one sense, but it might also serve as a signal for a catastrophe ; for, if the murderers heard the new-comers, they would carry out their purpose with all possible dispatch. However, at the same time the conversation on the other side of the door became louder and louder, and Baïa's childish voice rose to such a pitch that it deadened the sounds of the distant speakers. Paul, although trembling with anxiety and impatience, thereupon determined to wait a little longer. He might have summoned the persons who were approaching, for they were now near enough to hear him, still this course might have fatal results.

"I will wait till the monster gives the signal," thought he, "and then I will dart forward."

Seconds had become hours to him, and the life of poor Baïa depended upon the speed with which those who were approaching would arrive. It was certain that they were coming toward Biroulas's house. In such a deserted spot, and at such an hour of the night, their presence was otherwise unaccountable. At this trying moment, still another doubt was added to Paul's anxiety. These nocturnal wayfarers might be the confederates of the murderous smuggler instead of being honest men disposed to prevent a crime.

"Well, I will die with her!" muttered Paul, clenching his fists. He had no weapon with him, not even a stick in his hand, and against a band of enemies all resistance was impossible.

"Everything is ready," suddenly called out the pitiless scoundrel in ambush in the passage. "Bring the child at once, and I'll send her to sleep in the vault."

XI.

A TALK ABOUT SURGERY.

WHILE these strange events were going on, our friends in the Rue Férou were still up and about. The chevalier was suffering agonies with his dislocated shoulder, and after manifesting his intention of setting out immediately, he had been obliged to yield to Madame Mongis's remonstrances. However, Cassonade, who had been sent for a doctor, had a deal of trouble in finding one. The hour was late, especially for the Quartier Saint Sulpice, and Cambremer had no regular medical man, for he was never ill excepting when he was at sea. Finally, after ringing without avail at several doors, the squire at last succeeded in persuading a neighbouring practitioner to come and attend to his master. This Esculapius, more obliging than his fellow-practitioners, was the same doctor who had been present at the Odéon when the strange woman was found dead, and again at the commissary's office when Casse-Cou called there.

When the doctor was ushered into the room where the patient was awaiting him, seated in a large arm-chair between Madame Mongis and her daughter, he showed some surprise. "What! is it you?" cried he, with a laugh; "you seem to be doomed to accidents. Have you again been jumping from the boxes into the pit?"

Cambremer was in no humour for joking, and the sight of the doctor recalled too painful a remembrance for him to smile. "I fear that I am seriously hurt, sir," said he, in a tone which reminded the medical man of his professional duties.

"Let me see, my dear sir, let me see!" said the doctor, somewhat taken aback by so formal a reception.

The poor chevalier's arm hung inertly at his side, and the ligature which Cassonade had so cleverly devised was altogether insufficient to alleviate the sufferer's pain. "Oho!" said the doctor, shaking his head, "this is a new style of bandage. Who the deuce made it?"

"I did, sir," replied Cassonade, "and I'm not a skilful operator; but we have to do as we can when we find ourselves in a cellar."

"In a cellar! that's strange. I hear of nothing but cellars this evening," muttered the doctor, gently undoing the bandage.

"What did you say, doctor?" asked Cambremer, whose mind was still on the stretch as to the great problem of Baïa's abduction.

"Ah! good! there's no fracture; the humerus is intact," replied the practitioner.

"But pray tell me who talked to you about cellars this evening?" insisted the chevalier.

"Some one whom you know, my dear sir. But I see that we have only a dislocation to deal with."

"For Heaven's sake, tell me the person's name!" exclaimed Cambremer, moving about much more than was good for him in his injured condition.

"His name? Why, it was my old friend, the commissary of this district. The deuce! here's a bad distention of the ligaments, and perhaps some inflammation. Have you been in this state long?"

"I—I don't know—about fifteen hours, or twenty-four, perhaps. You were telling me about the commissary?"

"My dear madame, will you give me a pair of scissors to rip up this sleeve?" said the doctor, paying no attention to Cambremer's persistency. "It is indispensable; a shoulder can't be set right when the patient has his coat on."

Martha at once darted into the next room to fetch the scissors thus asked for, and meanwhile Cambremer resumed: "Come, doctor, pray tell me what you mean concerning your friend?"

"What! does it interest you?"

"More than you think."

"Then I may as well tell you the story; it will divert your mind while I set this troublesome humerus all right, and I won't pretend to say that I can do so without hurting you."

"No matter, if you will only tell me—"

"Ah! a thousand thanks, my charming young lady," said the irrepressible doctor, seeing Martha return with a huge pair of scissors. "Now we shall get on fast," he added, adroitly cutting off the sleeve of his patient's overcoat.

"But tell me about the cellar, doctor!"

"Well, this is it. My friend, the commissary, received a notice to-night—but, by the bye, what have you done with the little savage who went to see him with you?"

This question, carelessly put, produced such an effect upon all present that the doctor interrupted his preparations. His patient had started so suddenly that the scissors had almost run into his arm. Madame Mongis had turned pale, and Martha, on her side, had burst into tears.

"Well, well, she must have been very naughty, that young one," resumed the doctor, unaware of the pain he was giving; "wouldn't she learn French?"

"Oh, sir!" said the widow, with a deep sigh, "she has been taken away—stolen from us."

"Indeed! Why, that is an abduction! It is punishable by law, and my friend, the commissary—"

"No, no!" cried Cambremer, "I have made up my mind to avenge myself, unassisted."

"Good heavens! my dear patient, how you talk. Revenge is forbidden by law. But be careful, the decisive moment has come; this gentleman here will help me," added the doctor, pointing to Cassonade.

"I am ready to suffer, but, pray, speak!" cried the chevalier.

"Very well; I kept my little anecdote for the critical moment," said the

doctor. "Hold the forearm, my friend," he resumed, addressing the chevalier's squire.

The latter, who felt much more agitated than his master, obeyed.

"I was telling you," resumed the doctor, beginning to manipulate the dislocation with careful skill, "I was saying that orders were sent last evening to my friend, the commissary, to watch a house near the Barrière, the inhabitants of which were suspected of smuggling goods into Paris by means of a vault. But, pray, hold the forearm a little straighter, my man."

"Go on, doctor, go on!" gasped Cambremer.

"Am I hurting you very much?"

"No, but I beg of you—"

"Oh! I understand. Well, an exciseman had disappeared, and there were fears that he had been murdered by the people of that house."

Cambremer started.

"Good! now all my trouble is lost!" exclaimed the doctor. "Calm yourself, my dear patient, calm yourself. I cannot set a bone in its socket again as though I were putting a key into a lock."

Cassonade's brow was streaming with perspiration, and the women turned their eyes away.

"It even seems," continued the doctor, beginning his work all over again, "that one of these people's accomplices was arrested to-night. Ah! this time it's too bad; you have given another jerk; if you don't keep quiet, I shall have to relinquish the task."

The patient had half risen from his chair, exclaiming in a broken voice: "Where is the scamp? Where is he?"

"I will tell you when you sit down again."

Cambremer, pale with emotion, resumed his seat.

"This time I think that I shall succeed," said the persevering doctor. "Well, let me tell you, my dear sir, that the accomplice in question is a handsome young man, who came, like a fool, in a cab to the Barrière, where he was arrested."

"In a cab?" repeated Madame Mongis, who had suddenly grown attentive.

"Yes, quite so. Such are the times; robbers go about in cabs now-a-days."

"And you say that he has been arrested?" asked the chevalier, making the greatest efforts to control himself.

"I should say so, indeed; and the cab-driver as well."

"Did you see them?"

"No; they were shut up for the time being in the excise-office, and they must still be there, unless my friend, the commissary, on going there, has had them removed to the prefecture. But this is a very obstinate articulation," added the doctor, pulling vigorously at the troublesome arm.

Cambremer was evidently suffering tortures, for he was grinding his teeth, and his features were contorted. "What kind of young man was this—this gentleman?" asked Martha.

"Oh, quite a dandy, it appears, well dressed and combed, and so quiet-looking, that the exciseman who came to tell my friend about the arrest, declared that he looked like a girl."

"It is he!" muttered Martha.

"But the strangest thing of all was that the cab-driver declared that his

wife was waiting supper for him, and was making an infernal row. Those rascals have enough bounce—”

“Good heavens !” exclaimed Madame Mongis at this moment, “I have no further doubt. The persons who have been arrested are Monsieur Paul Vernier, and that good woman’s husband.”

“But then they must have been set free again,” remarked the chevalier, “The exciseman who was rescued with us must have gone back to the Barrière, and—”

However, Cambremer was obliged to stop. An atrocious pain checked his speech.

“There, there ; a second more, and it will all be over,” said the doctor, who had at last replaced the humerus.

“My master is fainting !” exclaimed Cassonade ; “we must revive him.”

Madame Mongis now came forward, and made the patient inhale some vinegar, which she held in readiness ; however, a dull, cracking sound finally announced that the operation was over.

“At last !” exclaimed the doctor, triumphantly. “It was by no means easy. Now, a bandage, some rest, and soothing drinks, and in a few days’ time you’ll be all right again.”

Cambremer was reviving, and breathing hard, like a man relieved from great pain. The doctor, pleased with his work, was examining his patient with satisfaction, and Madame Mongis affectionately pressed his hand. As for Cassonade, he was weeping with delight, and indulging in fanciful bounds, which fairly shook the floor of the room.

“Listen !” cried Martha, who, for a moment, seemed to have forgotten the wounded man.

Her mother looked at her in surprise.

“Bless me ! has everybody lost their wits ?” exclaimed the doctor, seeing the strange expression on the faces around him.

Everyone was listening to a noise that seemed to come from outside, and Cambremer himself, forgetting his past pain, had risen to go to the window.

“This won’t do,” resumed the medical man, “I’ve just told you that you must have rest, and now you can’t keep still. You seem to have made up your mind to spoil all my work—a serious dislocation set in less time than I would take to write a prescription.”

He was surely boasting, but Cambremer did not hear him. With his face against the window-pane, he was now trying to see what was going on in the street. A cab, coming at full speed, had just stopped outside the door, and the rolling of another vehicle was heard in the direction of the Rue de Vaugirard. This very unusual stir in so quiet a quarter, where people went to bed at nine at night, was attracting the tenants of the upper rooms to their windows. At the chevalier’s, everyone was so excited with regard to the dear ones who were absent, that the slightest sound outside was looked upon as a token of their return. This time, there was reason to believe that something had happened, for the rumble of the second vehicle had scarcely ceased when a loud knock was heard at the front door.

“Go down at once,” said Cambremer to his squire, “and see who it is.”

“Are you expecting a message from heaven ?” asked the doctor, amazed at the agitation which so simple an event had caused.

However, Cassonade had rushed downstairs, and Martha had followed

him on to the landing, in order to ascertain what had occurred as soon as possible.

"Well, I was saying," began the imperturbable doctor, "that you must have poultices on your shoulder for three days; and remain for six days on diet, and eight days in your room; at the beginning of next week you will be able to go out, unless—"

However, an exclamation from Martha abruptly interrupted these medical directions. "Ah, I knew it was he!" she exclaimed, with a cry of delight.

Her mother ran up, and Cambremer broke away from the doctor, who was giving his final directions, to see who was coming. Upheld, in fact almost carried by Cassonade, and followed by the faithful Morillon, Paul Vernier was mounting the stairs.

There was a deal of embracing at the door, followed by a torrent of broken words. The young man did not know to whom to listen the first, nor how or where to begin; however, in the midst of the confused congratulations which rained down upon him, he understood that his friends were anxious to hear what had happened to him. The group which had gathered around him finally entered the chevalier's rooms, where the doctor was raising his hands to Heaven, as though to testify that he had got into a lunatic asylum.

"Well, here you are at last, my dear Paul!" exclaimed Cambremer, taking the young fellow's hand; "I thought that you were lost."

"You were arrested, were you not, and detained?" asked Madame Mongis; "we were suffering dreadfully on your account."

"What!" exclaimed Paul, "then you know—"

"About the unpleasant night you have passed. Oh! we guessed it all! The doctor told us that a young man who had gone to the *Barrière d'Enfer* in a cab had been arrested, and we thought that it must be you."

"A criminal!" exclaimed the doctor, stepping back; "an escaped criminal! Oho!" he muttered, between his teeth, "what sort of a wasp's nest have I fallen into?"

The driver had not yet spoken aloud, but he had been whispering in Cassonade's ear in a very animated way, and the subject of his confidential communication seemed to be very interesting, at least to judge by the gestures the squire made.

"But you, sir?" now said Paul to Cambremer, whose shoulder was still uncovered, "you say nothing about yourself, and yet you have been injured?"

"Ah! would to Heaven that nothing worse had happened to those we love."

"Ah, Monsieur Paul! you don't know all our misfortunes yet!" rejoined Martha, clasping her hands.

"What has happened?"

"Baïa!" murmured the young girl, who lacked the courage to say any more.

"Baïa!" exclaimed Paul Vernier, suddenly understanding the cause of all the tears shed around him, "you are weeping on account of Baïa, then?"

"Yes—she has disappeared, she may be dead; our imprudence exposed her to those monsters. Ah! if I could but deliver her by giving my own life—"

However, while the young girl's sobs burst out afresh, Paul's face grew

bright with joy. "Look!" said he, taking Martha's hand, and she turned quickly towards him.

The actors in this scene were all standing around the young fellow who had thus been so unexpectedly restored to them, and they acted as the young girl did. The situation now became truly dramatic. The commissary of police wearing his scarf of office, and carrying Baia in his arms and smiling kindly at her, was standing on the threshold. And in the rear came the exciseman who had been rescued from the vault.

It would be impossible to describe fitly the scene that followed. For the first few moments there were tears, kisses and exclamations that would have moved the hardest heart. Then the little girl escaped from the arms of the commissary and ran up to Madame Mongis as though she had found her mother again. The doctor had reached the greatest degree of astonishment to which a member of the medical faculty is capable of attaining, and the sight of his friend the commissary playing the part of a child's nurse almost petrified him. He began to think that Cambremer's madness was of a contagious nature. However, the commissary undertook to reassure him by speaking. "Well, young man," said he to Paul, "have you recovered from your fright?"

"Thanks, sir. I am all right; the knife slipped, and there is only a scratch."

"You are wounded, too!" exclaimed the young girl.

"It is nothing, mademoiselle, nothing worth mentioning."

"Ah! my young friend, you owe me a deal of gratitude," resumed the commissary. "Just fancy, ladies," he added, turning to the feminine members of the audience, "as I was approaching the den of thieves which the excise officials had told me about, I found this fine fellow struggling with two rascals who would assuredly have sent him into the next world if my men had not interfered."

"And did they arrest the scamps?" cried Cambremer.

"Ah! no, unluckily! I thought I had them; but, unfortunately, one of my men spoke too loud, and when they pushed open the door of the court-yard, the scoundrels had already found time to rush into the house."

"And you didn't follow them?" exclaimed the chevalier, red with anger.

"Well, sir," said the commissary, who now resumed his official air, "I beg of you to believe that my men know their business, and that I did my duty."

"Well?"

"Well," added the doctor's friend, "it would seem that the rascals had some secret door in the wall at their disposal, for they vanished like a flash."

"They must have fled through the vault," exclaimed Cambremer.

"Oh! the vault has been explored from one end to the other, and I'll guarantee that they didn't escape that way."

"Well, it seems to be written that they will always be able to make off," muttered Chevalier Casse-Cou.

"Why do you think that, if you please?" asked the commissary, wounded in his self-respect as an official. "Now that we are on their trail, we shall take proper measures, and I'll venture to say that we shall soon arrest them."

Cambremer shook his head doubtfully.

"They certainly deserve the galleys," remarked Cassonade.

"Be easy on that score," rejoined the commissary, "I'll undertake to find them, and I must ask you, gentlemen, not to busy yourselves any further about this matter. However, hold yourselves in readiness, for I may require your testimony or that of this pretty little girl."

"She won't be able to tell you much," muttered the ex-grocer.

"Not now, I am aware of that; but I hope that these ladies will succeed in teaching her French, and I shall take upon myself to leave her in their care again."

"Thank you, sir," replied Madame Mongis.

"What! is it you, my dear doctor?" now exclaimed the commissary, seeing the doctor who had prudently kept in the background since the outset of this scene, which he did not in the least understand. "How came you here?"

"Dislocation of the left shoulder, a very delicate operation," stammered the physician.

"Ah, good! I understand; this is the gentleman who took the perilous leap, much as he did at the Odéon! The exciseman told me all about it."

"I don't know how to thank you for your trouble in bringing the child back to us," now said Madame Mongis to the official.

"Oh! that is of no consequence," he replied. "I am as much interested in her as you are, and I did not wish her to leave my sight till I knew that she was out of danger of another such attempt. By-the-bye, do you wish me to order a detective to keep watch over her?"

"Oh! that is unnecessary," said Cambremer, at once.

"We have one who is as good as ten," said Cassonade, "and when we have told you all about him, sir—"

However, the chevalier stopped his squire just as he was about to mention the name of the man in the Rue de la Lune. "I don't require any one's help," said Cambremer, decidedly.

The commissary did not insist, but motioned to the doctor that it was time to retire.

"Monsieur Paul," said Morillon, in a low tone, as he also turned to take his leave, "please ask your friend to employ me whenever he goes after those scoundrels. I want to catch them as much as he does."

XII.

A TRIP TO THE RUE DE LA LUNE.

CAMBEREMER did not obey the doctor's orders. He did not like "soothing drinks," nor did he care to take any rest. In fact, in spite of the fever which set in after the operation, he refused to remain for a single day in his rooms, and to the great grief of Madame Mongis he insisted upon going to the Rue de la Lune on the morrow in company of Cassonade. He was very desirous of seeing M. Gévaudan, who had given him so much reliable information about Biroulas, for he wished to acquaint him with the failure of his expedition. Having but little faith in the assurances of the commissary, he felt more than ever determined to act independently of all official intervention. However, to ensure the success of his plans, he required the help of the agent who went by the name of "Monsieur Joseph."

After making Madame Mongis promise not to leave Baïa for a single instant, he set out at a little before nine at night in order to reach the

Rue de la Lune at the very moment when Gévaudan was ready to see his clients. His recommendations to the widow were quite superfluous, for, since what had occurred, she watched over the child with increased solicitude, and she now even went so far as to ask Paul Vernier to remain with herself and her daughter till the chevalier returned. The young fellow, as may well be imagined, eagerly accepted this invitation to spend an entire evening with Martha, and Cambremer, prior to his departure, had the satisfaction of seeing his young friend seated at his neighbour's fireside. The only concession that the chevalier was willing to make as regards his condition was to refrain from walking, and to avail himself of Morillon's cabriolet, which he had engaged in the morning purposely for this trip. By trying hard three persons could squeeze into the famous canary-coloured vehicle, and the faithful squire took a seat between the chevalier and the driver. The latter enlivened the journey by a detailed account of his mishap on the night before. He was naturally lively and talkative, and had no end of jokes to crack at the expense of the excisemen who had been so adroitly tricked by the smugglers.

His gabble would not have interested Cambremer, however, had he not mingled a deal of useful information with the narrative of his burlesque adventure. He related, among other things, all that he knew about the antecedents of Paul Vernier, and the chevalier heard with regret that the mother of his young friend having been ruined by her husband, who had been a gambler, was now in a very precarious situation.

"The father was an excellent man," said Morillon, "but he was a prodigal, and besides, he had a number of bad acquaintances in Paris—speculators who were up to all sorts of bad tricks, and who helped him to reduce his widow to beggary."

"That wasn't poor Paul's fault," muttered Cambremer.

"True," said the driver, "but I'm afraid that he's too much like his father, for he dresses like a prince, and doesn't seem to mind how much money he spends; yesterday he wanted to give me five francs as a gratuity."

"He was in a hurry to help me."

"I daresay he was, but everybody isn't as rich as you are, Monsieur Cambremer," rejoined Morillon, who had not forgotten the chevalier's munificence on the famous night of the adventure at Frascati's; "but pray, what is Monsieur Paul doing in Paris?"

"He is in a banking-house."

"That is a bad business for him, sir, handling money all day, with his propensities, that means playing with fire. What's the banker's name, though?"

"Monsieur Bousenna," replied Cambremer, who was looking anxious.

"That is no Christian's name, any way! But it seems to me as though I had heard it before."

"Really? Can you remember where?"

"It seems to me that the first Monsieur Vernier had a friend with some such name as that."

"That may be; in fact, Paul told me that the banker had been in communication with his father."

"Yes, yes; I remember now. He used to come to La Roche from time to time, and whenever our poor master returned from Paris, after going there with him, his pockets were quite empty. I don't believe that that fellow was worth very much at that time."

"Would you know him again if you saw him?" asked Chevalier Casse-Cou.

"Upon my word, I can't say, for he must have changed a deal since then ; but if I remember rightly, he was a powerfully-built man, with a very bad look in his eyes. My wife would perhaps remember him better, for she stayed at La Roche till Monsieur Vernier died."

"I must speak to her about him," muttered Cambremer, who did not neglect any means of obtaining information.

"Take care there!" now called out Morillon, vigorously pulling up La Grise.

The cabriolet was going rapidly down the incline of the Pont Neuf, towards the quay on the right bank of the Seine, and had almost run over a shabby-looking fellow who had stopped short in the middle of the bridge. "Take care, you fool of a driver," retorted this man in a hoarse voice. However, instead of getting out of the way, he tried to lay hands on one of the shafts, and craned out his head to look into the vehicle.

"Down with your paws!" now called Morillon, with a cut of his whip which took in the impudent fellow's arm and La Grise's loins at the same time.

"Be careful!" exclaimed Cambremer, frightened to see the wheel graze the fellow's knees.

"Oh, never mind him," said Morillon, "he's a sot, and not worth as much as my mare's shoes."

"Well, he is very inquisitive, if he's drunk," said the sagacious Cassonade. "Did you see how he stared in our faces?"

"Yes," said his master, in a low tone, "and there are times when I feel inclined to think that we are incessantly being watched by our ever-flitting enemies."

"The fact is," resumed Morillon, "that that chap seems to me to be much the same sort of rascal as the one who went to find your lady friends the other night, in order to give your smuggler a chance to carry off the little girl."

"Who knows but what it may be the same man," muttered Cambremer.

"Bah! they can't do anything now; they are watched, and you'll see how they'll be caught!"

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, if you only knew what the commissary has done since yesterday you would be very easy in mind! The old barracks next door to me is full of policemen from garret to cellar; and in the vault there is quite a squad." "That is what one might call shutting the stable-door when the horse has been stolen!" said Cassonade, who was no doubt right.

They had now passed the Central Markets, and were going up the Rue Montorgueil at a walk. The chevalier did not reply to his squire's observation, although it was calculated to set him thinking. But with his mind on the stretch in regard to the interview he was about to have with M. Gévaudan, he did not feel inclined to look back. He was preparing what he would have to say to the detective of the Rue de la Lune, for he was more than ever convinced of the usefulness of this agent's information. The accuracy of the first particulars he had supplied in reference to Biroulas's abode, was, in Cambremer's eyes, a full guarantee of his sagacity. It was evidently no fault of Gévaudan's if the scamps who had kidnapped Baïa had been more skilful than her protectors, and it might be hoped that such bad luck would not occur again.

Cambremer bade Morillon stop at the corner of the Rue Poissonnière, enjoined upon him not to stir until his return, and then repaired on foot with Cassonade to the detective's lodgings. The lamp at the window was lighted, so the chevalier and his squire went upstairs, rang with the usual precautions, and were received with much less trouble than on the former occasions. It seemed, indeed, from the eagerness which M. Joseph displayed, as though he had been waiting for them. Nothing about him was changed, however—neither his mysterious ways, nor the precautions with which he surrounded himself. When those who had come to consult him were seated in his private room, and he had as usual taken his place behind the shaded lamp, he abruptly spoke these unexpected words: "Where are the thousand francs for my trouble?"

Although Cambremer had expected quite another beginning he was not disconcerted, but drew a bank-note from his pocket and laid it upon the table. M. Gévaudan held out his hand, took up the note, examined it carefully, and finally put it away in his pocket. "That is for my trouble," said he; "and if you wish me to go on with my investigations, I must have ten more."

At this unexpected demand, Cassonade sprang from his seat. It was not on his purse that this demand was made, but the devoted squire had so identified himself with his master that he looked after the chevalier's interests even better than after his own. Besides, the amount so lightly mentioned by M. Gévaudan was calculated to surprise the most open-handed capitalist.

"Excuse me," said Cambremer, "I understood that it was only in case of success that I—"

"Was to give me that sum," interrupted the detective in an ironical tone; "it seems that you have forgotten the wording of my letter. Shall I repeat what I wrote?"

"Oh! I remember perfectly well what you said, sir; but I confess that, after having failed so completely the first time—"

"Through your own fault."

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, I told you to keep everything secret, and you adopted quite a different course; for you told everything to two women and a young man of twenty."

"What, do you know all that?" exclaimed Cambremer, astonished that M. Gévaudan should be so well informed.

In point of fact, he had not yet spoken a word about his adventures, and it was certainly astonishing to hear this man enter into such details.

There was a moment of profound silence. The detective's eyes shone like live coals. "I am aware, for example," he eventually resumed, "that you have chosen to become very intimate with a certain Monsieur Paul Vernier."

Cambremer could not restrain a gesture of surprise. During the first interview which he had had with the detective, he had not mentioned his young friend's name, and he was astonished to find that Gévaudan was acquainted with it.

"Yes, a young man named Vernier," quietly continued the detective, "whom you picked up at a street corner, and in whom you have since placed entire confidence. That is your own affair, not mine; but I warn you that if you intend to tell him anything more about your plans, I will have nothing more to do with them."

"Do you mean to insinuate that Paul has played me false then?" exclaimed Chevalier Casse-Cou.

"I don't insinuate anything whatever; I warn you, that is all."

"But, Paul is devoted to me, and incapable of a bad act."

"That may be; but he is quite capable of becoming intoxicated, and even—of other things. However, the conduct of this young scapegrace is of no consequence, providing it does not interfere with me."

"But, even if Monsieur Vernier is a little bit flighty," said Cassonade, who was never at a loss, "you yourself must be a wizard, for you seem to know more about our adventures than any one else does."

On hearing this Gévaudan gave the squire a look which was anything but pleasant.

"Bless me!" added the ex-grocer, assuming an air of simple admiration, "what a fine thing the police service is, to be sure! but how in the world do you find out so much?"

"Well, my dear sir, you seem to me to be very intelligent," rejoined Gévaudan, "and I'm sure that you will understand my comparison. Supposing you invented a way of preparing molasses, more cheaply than other grocers can prepare them, well, you wouldn't go to tell them your secret, would you?"

"No."

"Well then, I am a dealer in private information, just as you are a dealer in molasses, and I have no inclination to tell you how I work."

"Oh, Monsieur Gévaudan, what I said was not intended to vex you. It was mere curiosity, you know."

"Of course, sir," now said Cambremer, wishing to bring the conversation back to the object of his visit, "I understand very well that the greatest secrecy is indispensable in your business, and I do not ask you to tell me how you work."

"You are right not to ask, for I shouldn't tell you."

"I am, besides, determined to continue hunting for these scoundrels, and I will make any sacrifice to reach them. But you won't take it amiss, I hope, if, before going any further, I ask you to tell me precisely why it was that I failed in my attempts yesterday."

"You absolutely desire to know the reason?"

"Yes; even if you have to tell me that my best friend is a traitor."

M. Gévaudan shrugged his shoulders and reflected for a moment. "It was chance that did everything," he slowly said.

"Chance! But it wasn't chance that told Biroulas that I was going to his house."

"No—he did not expect you, but he has for a long time, and especially for the last week or so, been aware that he was watched by the excisemen, and he had made up his mind to leave his house near the Barrière d'Enfer for good. However, he did not wish to abscond without revenging himself, and as he expected that his place would be searched that morning, he had prepared a snare for the greencoats."

"The trap-door—do you mean?"

"I do. He sent that woman, whom you followed to Frascati's, he sent her, I say, to the house, and she hid herself at the end of the passage, ready to close the trap as soon as the game was bagged. However, instead of the excisemen, she saw you appear."

"Ah! I understand now," interrupted Casse-Cou. "She recognised me, and wished to profit by the chance so as to rid herself of an enemy."

"That is marvellously well reasoned, my dear sir, and you will see that the rest of the story is quite clear. When that creature had the sweet satisfaction of seeing you enter the passage with your friend and fall into the vault, she said to herself that that was no reason for her to relinquish her purpose of playing a trick upon the excisemen, and so she remained at her post, quite easy in mind as to your fate, for she thought that you had been stunned by the fall, and would in any case die of hunger."

"That woman must be a fiend," ejaculated the chevalier.

"So she is. I told you that she remained waiting for that fool of an exciseman to come, and she sent him on the same road as yourself; however, after this last operation, she made off, taking good care to secure the trap which sealed you up at twenty feet below the level of the soil. And then she went to join Biroulas."

"True. I know the cabman who drove her away," muttered Cambremer.

"So do I," said M. Gévaudan, with a singular smile; "and although I wasn't present when the two accomplices met, I can guess what they said to one another. That wretched woman must have told her employer that you had walked into the wolf's mouth and they must have plotted together to profit by your absence so as to kidnap the little girl."

"But they couldn't guess that Paul would be sent by the ladies, and—"

"Ah! it is now that mere chance ceases to have anything to do with the matter. Are you quite sure that your interesting young friend did not tell anybody that he went almost every evening to the Rue Férou?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"Well, if he ever did so, as is quite likely, the end is easy to guess. Biroulas hearing of the young fellow's visits to the Rue Férou, must have watched him. Monsieur Vernier must have been seen entering your house, and then rushing out like a madman, and it was easy to guess that your neighbours had sent him to look for you."

"And it was then that they concocted a story and sent one of their gang to induce the ladies to leave home I suppose?" remarked the chevalier.

"Well, it was all very simple, for to pick a lock is nothing to such scoundrels, and the woman, no doubt, persuaded the little girl that her mother was waiting for her."

Cambremer was amazed by M. Gévaudan's clear reasoning, and was forced to admit that all his conjectures seemed highly probable. He even reproached himself with not having thought of this plausible explanation of the affair; and he conceived a very high opinion of the attainments of the detective who had so easily unwound such a complicated skein of events. "Now, sir," said the chevalier eagerly, "now, what is to be done to find these scoundrels again? Speak, tell me, and I will follow your orders blindly."

M. Gévaudan did not make any haste to reply. He seemed to be reflecting upon the bearing of the words just uttered. "Before I tell you what to do," he said at last in a pleasant tone which strongly contrasted with his former bearish manner, "I have two questions to ask you."

"What are they?"

"You have had a miraculous escape, upon which I sincerely congratulate you. The ladies whose good luck led them to the very house with which the vault communicates; the police who were warned by the excise men and came up just at the right moment to deliver your young man

from his foes and search Biroulas's den—all that was really marvellous. But I should like to know whether in your further operations you intend to rely upon the help which the commissary of your district has no doubt offered you."

"Not at all!" replied Cambremer at once. "I did not tell him one word as to my plans; I did not even mention your name to him, and he only knows what occurred yesterday."

"Very well; I asked you that because I prefer to work alone. If you prefer to be helped by the police-force, don't hesitate to say so; I will willingly retire, and I have so many matters on hand that I need not regret losing this job."

"Oh no! sir; I rely upon you, and you alone."

"So be it, then. Let us now proceed to the second question which, in point of fact, I have already asked you. Are you disposed to give me the ten thousand francs which I shall need to continue my search?"

"Yes, certainly," replied Cambremer, who would have sacrificed all he was worth without the slightest regret; "but I haven't such a sum of money about me now."

"No matter," replied M. Gévaudan, with an air of indifference; "it will do very well if I have the money to-morrow."

"Then I give you my word that I will bring it to you."

"I rely upon you in doing so; and, in the meantime, I will give you some information which is worth the full amount."

Cambremer listened, holding his breath so as not to lose a word of what the detective said.

"Biroulas, as you may well suppose," resumed M. Gévaudan, "has several hiding places and will not set foot again in the suburbs. He is a very skilful, cunning rascal, but he has his weak points. What would you have! Nobody is perfect."

"Then you think that he might—"

"Be caught? Certainly. Men are often entrapped by their own vices; that's an axiom which I always go by. Well, I was saying that this Biroulas, who is very skilful in his trickery, has a weakness for amusing himself. When he isn't smuggling goods into the city, he eats, drinks, dances, and does all sorts of pleasant things. He is perpetually making merry with a woman who is as bad as he is."

"Well?"

"Well, to-morrow is Wednesday, and in a week it will be Shrove-Tuesday. Now, I am sure, positively sure, that our man—who will perhaps hide himself all the week, to throw the police off the scent—will go to 'bury the Carnival,' as they put it, at the masked ball at that famous tavern, the Vendanges de Bourgogne; and end his night at La Courtille with the adventures from Frascati's."

"If that were only true!" exclaimed Cambremer, clinching his fists.

"Well, I shall be there myself," said M. Gévaudan, "and I shall have a reliable friend with me to help you if necessary."

"But a week is a very long time to wait."

"Oh! don't be uneasy, if I can catch him before Tuesday, I shall not fail to do so; but, in any case, we shall not miss him then, for I know his habits. Besides, you will be informed of everything as soon as is necessary, and in the meantime I will sum up the programme. To-morrow night you must send me the money by this man here so as not to inconvenience yourself, and on Sunday at the latest, you will hear from me."

The chevalier had no time to raise any objections, for M. Gévaudan now rose up and took the lamp to light his visitors to the door. "Excuse me," said he, with a bow, "but I have an appointment with another client at ten o'clock, and it wouldn't be quite the thing for you to meet him here. My clients are all rather fond of secrecy."

Cambremer wished to ask for other information respecting Biroulas, the unfortunate woman of the Odéon, and little Baïa, but the tone in which M. Gévaudan spoke did not admit of a reply. So the chevalier was obliged to depart, regretting that the conversation had been so brief.

"Shall you go to that ball, sir?" asked Cassonade, as they went down stairs.

"I would go to the nameless regions if need were, to find that man again," replied Chevalier Casse-Cou.

"Well, sir," said the ex-grocer, when they found themselves in the street, "I don't know whether you are like me, but I don't feel quite satisfied with Monsieur Gévaudan."

"Why not?" inquired Cambremer, who had left the detective full of enthusiasm as to his projects.

"Why, in the first place, he asks for money too often. If you go on at this rate, you will soon be ruined."

"What does that matter if I succeed?"

"Well, I'm beginning to think that we shall attain our purpose much better by keeping quiet."

"You must be crazy. Those wretches are prowling round about Baïa like wolves round a lamb, and if I don't annihilate them with all possible despatch, they will kill her as they killed her mother."

"But if you gave up pursuing them, what interest would they have in burdening themselves with another crime?"

"Bah! they have no consciences."

"Oh! their consciences don't trouble them certainly, but they surely won't run the risk of the galleys or even worse for the pleasure of killing the little girl supposing she doesn't trouble them."

"Will you please explain yourself?" said Cambremer, impatiently.

"Upon my word, sir, I do not pretend to be very cunning, but in your place this is what I should do. I should go and travel about for six months or so with Baïa. Madame Mongis and her daughter wouldn't refuse to accompany you, and all that wouldn't cost you the ten thousand francs which you are going to give to this fellow Gévaudan."

"What! fly from such base wretches as they are? Never!"

"It wouldn't be flying; it would only be feigning a retreat, in order to trap the enemy."

"How's that?"

"Why, when they saw that they were no longer tracked, they would become confident again, relax their precautions, and as they have no end of bad deeds already on their consciences, why, some fine day the police would catch them without needing any help from us."

"But don't you understand that it is a struggle for life and death between them and me, and that they will follow me to the ends of the earth?"

"I'll venture to say that they won't. They only hate you because you want to restore the little girl her inheritance, and avenge her mother; but if they learned that you had gone away, they would believe that you had given up your intentions, and they wouldn't run after you."

This conversation took place on the filthy side pavement of the Rue de la

Lune, and the chevalier had stopped to listen to his squire's plan. In spite of his natural partiality for violent measures, he was forced to admit that Cassonade spoke the language of reason. The squire who saw that the chevalier was reflecting, made yet another effort to convert him to his views.

"You see, sir," said he, "that everything could be very well arranged. We could all go and settle somewhere in the country. The ladies could employ their time in teaching Baïa French. As soon as the dear child knows how to talk she will tell us her whole story, and with the information which she will give us, we can return to Paris armed with every possible weapon for renewing the campaign against Biroulas."

"But all that can be done here. We can find greater facilities here for teaching Baïa."

"Perhaps so, but I am afraid that if she remains in Paris, we shall lose her before she knows any French."

Cambremer hung his head, and could not find any effective answer to Cassonade's common-sense arguments.

"If she remains," urged the ex-grocer, whose eloquence now rose to heights before unknown, "why, during every hour of the day and night, her life, yours, and our neighbours' will be at the mercy of these scoundrels. We may escape them once, twice, or three times in succession, but in the long run they will end by killing us."

"And do you think that Madame Mongis would consent to leave Paris with us?" asked the chevalier, greatly shaken in his convictions.

"Why not? She adores Baïa, and to save the dear little creature's life she would do whatever you ask."

"But she would never allow me to pay the expenses of the journey," said Cambremer, who knew how scrupulously delicate the widow was.

"That may be, but she can receive her widow's pension as well in the country as in Paris; and there is nothing to prevent her from working at her embroidery."

Cassonade had a reply for everything, and his master began to think that this plan of temporising might indeed be the best one. After some final hesitation, he almost determined to follow it, but suddenly a fresh thought flashed across his mind.

"How about Paul?" he asked. "Do you think that I could go away and leave that young man exposed to the vengeance of Biroulas and his gang? They know him now, they know that he is mixed up in our undertaking, and that he will continue to serve us. They would kill him while we were away."

"No, they wouldn't," replied the squire, "for I hope that Monsieur Paul would keep quiet during our absence. Young people, you see, sir, only spoil everything, especially when they are in love."

These last words suggested a fresh objection to the chevalier. "Those children love one another," he murmured, thinking of Paul and Martha Mongis; "how can I separate them from one another?"

"There is a great deal to be said as to that, sir, and it would be as well for your Monsieur Paul to go away from Paris for awhile, for it isn't a good place for him, so far as I can hear on all sides."

"You are right, perhaps; but Paul is in a banking-house, and I have no right to take him from a situation in which he is earning an honest living."

"Humph! do you remember what our driver told us just now about that man, that Monsieur—what is his name?"

"Bousenna. The man is, in fact, somewhat suspicious to me, but no matter! Paul's mother selected him, and he ought to consult her before leaving his situation."

In his turn, Cassonade began to reflect. "What if I stay here to watch over him?" said he at last. "It would greatly pain me to leave you, sir, but if that were necessary to persuade you to go away, I should be quite willing to separate."

"But if you remained you would be quite as much in danger as the rest of us."

"Don't be afraid of that. In the first place, if anything happened to me, it wouldn't injure any one, except, perhaps, Pétronille, my wife, and I'm sure that you would take care of her."

"You are right in saying that, my friend, but I don't want you to sacrifice yourself for my sake."

"Oh! don't be afraid of that. I know what to do. In the first place, I should take back my shop. They wouldn't come there to find me, and it wouldn't prevent me from keeping an eye on the young man."

Chevalier Casse-Cou was conquered by this persistent devotion. "My friend," said he, in a feeling voice, "I thank you for the help which you offer, and I don't refuse it. It would perhaps be best to place Baïa in a safe place. We shall be able to wage the contest all the more effectively if we know that the dear little creature is out of the reach of those scoundrels."

"That's certain; and for my part, I shall be a deal more free in my movements when I have no further fear of finding the child gone on returning home."

"Well, if you like, you shall be the pioneer of our expedition, and I will join you when I think the moment favourable; however, before going away with Baïa, I wish to make a final attempt."

"What! you still want to risk your life by going to that ball where you will no doubt fall into the midst of Biroulas's band?"

"Perhaps I shall go there; however, I haven't yet made up my mind. My determination will depend upon the success of a step which I shall take to-morrow. But it is understood from this time forth that, if we don't succeed in a week from now, we will leave Paris."

"You promise me that, sir, eh?"

"Yes, I promise it you."

"Then, I am beginning to hope that we shall escape the traps of all these rascals, although between now and Tuesday they will have time to play us more than one dirty trick."

"We shall be on our guard. Let us now return to the cabriolet and drive back home. I never feel easy when I am detained out of doors like this."

Thereupon Cambremer, followed by his squire, repaired to the spot where he had left the vehicle. When they reached the corner of the Rue Poissonnière, they saw the cabriolet but not its driver. It was raining a little, and Morillon was under the cape. He had even fallen asleep, while La Grise, used to long standing and waiting, stretched out her neck amid the sleet. Jacqueline's husband was sleeping so soundly that Cambremer had to shake him roughly to rouse him.

"All right, sir, all right!" cried Morillon, rubbing his eyes, and then, almost immediately recognising his best customer, he added: "What! have you already returned, sir?"

"Why, a full hour has gone by since we left you," said Cambremer, with a laugh.

"That's strange ! it seems to me as though you had only just gone."

"That's because you were asleep."

"Well, you see, I went and took a glass in a wine-shop over there. I met some fellows whom I don't know, but they offered me a drink, and when I got into the trap again, the cold must have seized upon me. If you hadn't come back I might have slept on till the morning."

"Don't let us lose any time," urged Cambremer.

"Oh no, get in, sir, get in, and we will soon make up for it all ; La Grise has had a good rest, and she'll take you home at a sharp trot."

As soon as the chevalier and his squire had climbed to their seats, the driver whipped up his mare and the cabriolet began whisking up the Rue Poissonnière.

"It's strange, but every time that I hear of strangers prowling about us, I imagine that they are people in Biroulas's employ," remarked the suspicious Cassonade.

"Oh ! the fellows who stood me a drink were altogether too nice-looking to belong to his gang," rejoined Morillon. "If I had had to deal with any tramps like the chap we met on the Pont Neuf, I shouldn't have drunk with them."

Cambremer did not listen very attentively to this conversation for his thoughts were mainly in the Rue Férou. He longed to see Madame Mongis and tell her of the new plan, to which he foresaw that there would be some kind of objection.

However, the vehicle had reached the top of the slight ascent leading up the street from the boulevard, and La Grise now began to go at a fast trot towards the Central Markets.

"Hallo !" suddenly exclaimed Cambremer, waking up from his reverie. "It seems to me that we are tilting over to the left."

Indeed, he had scarcely spoken when the left wheel of the cabriolet became detached, and fell heavily on one side.

"Ah, sir ! I was sure there had been some trickery," gasped Cassonade, as soon as he had recovered from the shock sufficiently to speak.

XIII.

IN WHICH CHEVALIER CASSE-COU TAKES A WALK.

THE occupants of the yellow cabriolet rose up after a terrible fall with their clothes all wet and muddy. The pavement of the Rue Montorgueil was not soft by any means, and La Grise, who had been thrown upon her left side with great violence, was in a pitiable state. However, the most injured of all was certainly Cambremer, who had no need of a fresh accident. He had been seated on the left side of the vehicle, and had fallen on the very shoulder previously injured in the vault. Fortunately for him, the articulation had remained firm, and the doctor's work had not been spoilt. Indeed, the chevalier was the first to rise, and he helped his companions out of the unlucky vehicle.

A crowd had collected of course, and the bystanders, according to the invariable custom, overwhelmed the sufferers with prying questions. However, Morillon, who was in a very bad humour, received them ex-

tremely roughly, and, thanks to the help of a few workmen, the mare was unharnessed, set on her legs, and led back to the Rue de Vaugirard. As for the cabriolet, it was necessary for the time being to drag it as well as could be managed to the nearest wheelwright's shop. It could no longer be used as a means of transport, nor could it be left to block up the public highway.

Cambremer returned home leaning upon the arm of Cassonade, who also had escaped with a few hard bruises. The chevalier, before going to bed, and although he greatly needed rest, communicated his new plans to his neighbours, and they all held counsel together in the ladies' room. Madame Mongis did not at first show herself very willing to leave Paris, but Cassonade's eloquence finally triumphed over her objections. In order to persuade her, the sagacious squire brought forward all his arguments, including those to be derived from the fresh accident which his master had just met with.

Whilst the idlers were surrounding the overturned cabriolet, and Morillon was swearing and cursing as he removed his mare from the broken shafts between which she at first remained with her hoofs in the air, Cassonade had made investigations as to the cause of the accident. He found that the nut of the axle-tree screw had been removed, and concluded that some one had succeeded in removing it before the cabriolet had started. If the iron had suddenly snapped some fragments would have been found on the pavement. So the intention to injure the occupants of the vehicle was evident, and it was not difficult to guess how matters had been managed.

While the imprudent Morillon was allowing himself to be tempted by the drinks offered him by some unknown men, an accomplice, waiting in the street, had removed the nut. This operation, easy enough in itself, was all the more readily accomplished as there was scarcely any one about the street. The culprit had no doubt been that seemingly drunken man whom they had met on the Pont Neuf. When once the nut had been removed he had slipped away, relying upon the effect which must, perforce, ensue. The wheel held on sufficiently not to give way in going up the incline, but not enough to remain secure as soon as the mare began to trot fast; and down such an abrupt slope as that of the Rue Montorgueil the fall might have had fatal consequences for the driver and his "fares."

These very reasonable conjectures being admitted as probable, Cassonade felt no doubt but what this fresh act of perfidy to which Baïa's protectors had so nearly fallen victims, was the work of Biroulas's gang. His belief on this point was very firm, and he had no difficulty in persuading his friends in the Rue Férou to share it. It was clear that they were surrounded by a network of plots and traps, and that their enemies were working in the shade against the little girl and those who defended her.

To leave Paris, and by this course rid themselves of this incessant persecution, had almost become a necessity of the situation. It was, therefore, agreed that they would all go to the south of France, and their departure was settled for the middle of the following week.

However, Cambremer, whilst approving of the projected journey, insisted upon putting the talents of the agent in the Rue de la Lune to the test once more. He, moreover, decided that an incessant watch should be kept over Baïa, and Cassonade was especially selected as her bodyguard.

Martha, it must be admitted, did not show any enthusiasm as regards a plan which, if carried out, would separate her from Paul, perhaps for a long time; but she was one of those persons who do not easily show their

feelings, and she did not give expression to what was going on in her heart.

Cambremer possessed that delicacy of mind which enables a person to guess the most secret thoughts of those he loves, and so he endeavoured to soften the bitterness of a separation by promising a prompt return. "We shall be back before the end of the summer," he smilingly declared, "and we shall profit by the fine weather to pay a visit to Madame Vernier in the provinces."

The conference was a lengthy one, and Paul did not put in an appearance that evening, being, perhaps, detained at his desk by some extra work.

On the morrow, at a very early hour, Chevalier Casse-Cou went up to his neighbour's rooms, and, to their great astonishment, announced his intention of going out with Baïa. On hearing this, Madame Mongis ventured to expatiate upon the danger of walking about the streets with a child who had so recently escaped being kidnapped. But Cambremer firmly declared that he was not a man to allow his dearest treasure to be stolen from him, and he added that his excursion would lead to very important results.

The widow then brought forward the plea that the little girl must feel very tired after her dangerous journey to the *Barrière d'Enfer*. In fact, although she had been brought back unharmed by the commissary, she seemed to be plunged in a strange torpor, which contrasted strongly with the habitual vivacity of her manner. It was evident that her young mind had realised the magnitude of the peril from which she had so miraculously escaped, and that her little heart had experienced severe trials. But she was unable to tell how she felt, and she did not even, as usual, express herself by lively and animated gestures. The details of her sad adventure, therefore, remained entirely unknown to her protectress.

However, when Madame Mongis made her understand that her friend, the chevalier, wished to take her out with him, she manifested great delight at the idea. She several times repeated the name of Francis, which she knew how to pronounce, and she clapped her hands joyfully. Cambremer, delighted by the child's evident pleasure, made haste to profit by it, and went out with her as soon as she had been warmly wrapped up in a comfortable cloak which Martha had made for her.

He had a double aim in undertaking this excursion. In the first place, he wished to carry out an idea which had originated with Madame Mongis at an earlier date. A long walk through Paris might, by a lucky chance, bring the little girl in front of the house where she had resided when she first arrived in the city, for it was not at all certain that Biroulas had received her at his house near the *Barrière*. If this eventuality presented itself, the chevalier hoped that it would lead to important revelations. Moreover, he was acquainted with a learned old gentleman who was remarkably well versed in the Oriental languages, which he had been diligently studying for half a century; and the chevalier had resolved to have Baïa examined by this erudite personage, to see whether he could recognise the strange language which she spoke.

The Orientalist lived in the neighbourhood of the Arsenal, and a visit to his rooms would afford an excellent excuse for walking through Paris. Cambremer intended to go along by the quays, and return by way of the boulevards—varying his route, so as to increase his chances of discovery.

He took care to begin his walk by passing in front of the *Odéon*, and when he found himself in front of that classic monument he indulged in all

the gestures which his fancy suggested to him to ask Baïa if she remembered having been there. His pantomime was successful, for the little girl replied in the same way that she recognised the door and the heavy colonnade. She even added—of course by signs—that she had come there in a carriage. This detail, unknown till now, might be of importance later on if the cab which had conveyed Biroulas and his victims to the theatre could be found again.

Cambremer took special note of it, and then went on toward the quays. Baïa's manner gave him hope. She walked briskly along, holding the hand of her good friend, Francis, and glancing with intelligent eyes at the houses and the passers-by. At each crossing, she looked quickly up and down the streets, and more than once she seemed about to stop. Cambremer now felt confident that her mind was bent upon the same aim as his own. Thus seconded in his search, he certainly had many chances of success, and he congratulated himself on having had such a good idea.

He reached the Pont Neuf by the Rue Dauphine, and scarcely had Baïa caught sight of the Seine when she gave evident signs of surprise. They were on the left hand side of the bridge, and there was then an expanse of water, which the Mint Lock has since greatly diminished. The chevalier raised the little girl in his arms, so that she might the better enjoy the fine view, and he soon realised that she was now gazing upon it for the first time.

The river, especially, seemed to excite her admiration, and various indications could be found in the astonishment she so simply expressed. In the first place, it was probable that she had never crossed the Seine, at least during the daytime. Cambremer, whose imagination was lively, went even further in his conjectures, for he thought from Baïa's astonishment that she had never seen any large river before. However, to make sure that he was not in error on this point, it would have been necessary for him to understand the child, whom Martha's lessons had not yet enabled to reply to such complicated questions. The impossibility of carrying on any conversation became all the more irritating as they went on, and the chevalier admitted to himself that he could not accomplish anything as long as he had not found an interpreter.

"No one but my old friend, Dillenius, could help us," he muttered, as he quickened his steps, the little girl gaily trotting beside him in the meanwhile.

Cambremer arrived without any further incident at the Quai de l'Arsenal, where the Orientalist, on whom he based so many hopes, resided. He recognised the old house, where he had more than once gone to consult his learned friend as to some literary or historical difficulty, for, Chevalier Casse-Cou though he was, he had always had a marked partiality for study. His acquaintance with the professor dated from the time of his journey to Greece; he had wished, before starting, to get some inkling into the tongues spoken in the Levant. The information he had then acquired had not been of any use to him, it must be admitted; first, because he had had no time to dip deeply into the fount of knowledge; and, secondly, because he had been taken to the hospital as soon almost as he landed at the Morea. He had, therefore, returned to France without bringing back the slightest knowledge of any foreign tongue. Still, he entertained none the less a great respect for the learned recluse of the Arsenal, and he felt sure that the visit which he was about to pay him would yield some good results.

The professor had resided for more than twenty years on the first floor of

a strange structure, which the doubtful taste of the sixteenth century had adorned with superposed pediments. The frontage of this complicated building was not wanting in majesty; but there were huge cracks in the walls, the roof was peeling off, and the arrangements were so unsuited to the needs of modern life that the professor was the only person bold enough to reside in the place.

The chevalier led Baïa up a stone staircase, the loosened steps of which disclosed many a yawning abyss, but by dint of great care they finally succeeded in reaching a worm-eaten door without breaking their limbs. This door proved to be open, and they went in.

A long, badly-lighted passage led to the sanctuary where the old man whom the chevalier had come to consult received his visitors. It was a room with a vaulted roof in which three persons at a time could only be received with difficulty. The available space was, moreover, greatly diminished by piles of books and heaps of papers of all sizes and shapes. The walls were covered with immense placards bearing strange characters, and an ostrich's egg suspended from the ceiling, lent a most singular look to this strange studio. Only half-a-dozen retorts, and two or three telescopes were needed to transform it into an alchemist's laboratory or an astrologer's observatory.

Seated in front of a table, and bending over a manuscript yellow with age, the occupant of the room was quite in keeping with his surroundings. M. Dillenius had formerly been called Dom Dillenius, for, prior to the great Revolution, he had belonged to the Benedictine order of monks, and he was now nearly eighty years of age.

He was a bald-headed old man, bent by age, but still vigorous, and he had a very prominent aquiline nose which almost touched a projecting chin. With his sunken lips, his heavy, bristling eyebrows, and his eyes set deeply in his head, he was not unlike the pictures of Punch, and at first sight he had quite the appearance of some formidable wizard. An Italian would have shrunk from the still brilliant flash of his eyes, and would have fled for fear of feeling the influence of the *jettature*.

However, Father Dillenius, as his pupils familiarly called him, was an excellent man, incapable of casting a spell upon any one, and quite ready to do any act of kindness, providing that it did not separate him from his dear old books. Since he had resigned his professorship he never left his scientific den. He took his meals upon a huge book which he used as a table, and he had even made a bed of some soft old papers. The great work to which he was devoting his remaining years was the compilation of a dictionary of the Thibetan tongue, which he thought destined to revolutionize the learned world. However, he sometimes enlivened this arduous task by translations of Sanscrit poetry dating from almost pre-historic times.

Cambremer had no doubt but what he would obtain immediate enlightenment from this learned man, who looked upon the explanation of the living tongues of the East as mere child's play. Dom Dillenius was a book which it sufficed to turn over, a fount of science from which one merely had to drink, and the success of the consultation seemed almost certain.

Meantime, hearing footsteps, the learned man raised his head to see what profane being had ventured to enter his sanctuary. "What, is it you, my dear child?" he exclaimed, as soon as he recognised his former pupil, Cambremer. "What good wind has blown you this way? Are you again thinking of going to the Levant? It would suit me exactly, for I

would get you to procure me a copy of a certain Persian manuscript which must be in the library of the monks of Mount Athos, and—”

“I regret, my dear master, that I shall not be able to render you that service,” interrupted Cambremer. “It isn’t a desire to revisit Greece that has brought me here.”

“So much the worse, my dear child, so much the worse, for the manuscript is very curious, and I am the only one who is aware of its existence, so that—”

“I came to consult you with regard to this little girl,” hastily put in the chevalier, in order to interrupt the expansion of the old man’s philological schemes.

“Ah! I did not see her. I congratulate you, my dear friend; you must be proud to be the father of such a pretty child.”

Dom Dillenius had formerly been aware of the fact that Cambremer had lost both his wife and child, but learned men easily forget the material events of life, and this one carried his indifference for social matters so far that eight months after the Revolution of July, he thought that Charles X. was still seated upon the throne of France. Cambremer knew him too well to be surprised by his mistake, but he at once began to tell him the story of his little charge.

Baïa had not been at all frightened on entering the dark study, and the sight of the emaciated old man did not seem to cause her the least fear. However, she looked at him with astonished eyes, which she turned from time to time upon her friend Francis, as though to ask him the reason of their visit.

As soon as the chevalier had related the strange story with which he had been anxious to acquaint the Orientalist, the latter straightened himself up like a war-horse at the sound of the trumpet.

“Upon my word, my dear child!” he exclaimed, rubbing his hands, “this is very singular, very singular, indeed; and you had an excellent idea in coming to me. So this dear little creature speaks an unknown tongue, does she? Ah! and no one has been able to make it out? You said to yourself: ‘I’ll go and find my old friend Dillenius in his garret on the Quai de l’ Arsenal,’ and you were right.”

“I indeed believed, my dear master, that you would be as kind as you are learned; I have the greatest interest in getting Baïa to explain herself, and you alone, perhaps, in all Paris, can help me.”

“Oh! I alone! That is saying too much,” replied Dom Dillenius, modestly; “you must not snub the official Orientalists, still I flatter myself that I know as much as they do. You shall see. But you must bring the little girl nearer to me, for I am somewhat deaf.”

Cambremer thereupon drew up his chair and took Baïa upon his knees.

“Now, my friend,” said the old man of learning, throwing himself back in his chair with an air of satisfaction, “tell her to speak.”

This order, so easy to give, was nevertheless very embarrassing to the chevalier. Baïa was not like most children of her age who talk incessantly. Either because she was naturally taciturn, or realised the futility of speaking words which nobody understood, she maintained a melancholy silence most of the time. Even her chats with Martha were carried on in pantomime, intermingled with a few interjections in her unknown language. So there was but little chance that she would open her lips in the presence of a stranger.

However, the main difficulty with Cambremer consisted in asking her to

give the professor a specimen of her maternal tongue. How could he give any orders to a child who did not speak a word of French?

"My dear master," he said at last, "I think that it would be better to begin the other way. Instead of waiting for the dear little thing to explain herself, you had better question her in all the languages which you know so well, and we shall soon find out which one is her own."

"You are right," replied M. Dillenius, after a moment's reflection; "and I will begin the examination."

He rose up, took from his shelves seven or eight old books covered with dust, and spread them out before him.

"We will proceed by elimination, as the mathematicians say," he remarked, "and try the least known tongues the first. As soon as I have failed with one, I will proceed with another, till we come to the language which the child speaks."

Cambremer was all ears.

"To begin with, here are the 'Vedas,' in Sanscrit, from which I will read a few passages," resumed M. Dillenius.

"But Sanscrit is a dead language," the chevalier ventured to remark.

"Yes, but the priests of India are acquainted with it, and how do you know that this child was not brought up in a pagoda, where she may have been intended to fulfil the almost sacred functions of a bayadeer?"

This supposition seemed very unlikely to Cambremer; however, he allowed the professor to make the attempt. The reading began, and the strange words which Dillenius articulated with majestic slowness failed to produce the slightest effect upon the little girl.

"We will now proceed with the common tongues of Hindostan," said the Orientalist, composedly. "There are six principal ones, and I will begin with the Tamoul."

After this announcement he read some strange sentences, and it was a singular sight to behold him reading and Baïa listening to him with astonishment. However, he vainly tried all the dialects of the Indian peninsula; the child did not give the least sign that she understood him. Dillenius, following the plan which he had adopted, now turned to more familiar tongues. Persian and Turkish were tried without success, and Cambremer was beginning to despair when the man of learning, opening a huge book with brass catches, began to read these words: "El hamdou lillahi rabbi el àlâmina."

"Rahmani rahimi," said the little girl, with great animation.

"She understands you!" exclaimed Cambremer, greatly excited.

While he was making this remark, Baïa continued articulating a series of words, each stranger than the preceding one. She gave vent to this species of melopœia with incredible rapidity, and after going on thus for some little time she suddenly stopped. It seemed as though she had been repeating a lesson.

Dom Dillenius appeared delighted at having at last elicited some response from her. He listened to her with a knowing look and nodding his head, glancing triumphantly at his former pupil.

When silence again reigned in the study and Baïa had resumed her imperturbable calmness, Cambremer naturally felt anxious to inquire what discovery had been made. "Well, my dear master?" said he, with emotion.

"Well, my dear child, I told you that I should succeed, and I have done so," replied the professor, rubbing his hands.

"But what language is this, and what did Baïa say to you?"

"This language is the simplest of all, and the very one by which I ought to have begun. As for what the little girl said, it wouldn't interest you, for she merely finished the first verse of the Koran, of which I had read the beginning."

"The Koran!" exclaimed the chevalier; "why then, she speaks Arabic?"

"Yes, and very purely, I assure you. The sacramental formula of Mohammedanism could not be more correctly articulated, and your little ward's pronunciation would do honour to any Ulema of Damascus or Cairo."

"It is incredible!" murmured Cambremer, in amazement. "What strange adventures can have brought this child from the East to France? What possible connection can exist between the country where she was born, and a man like Biroulas, who passes his life in defrauding the excise in Paris?"

The chevalier put these questions rather to himself than to Dom Dillenius, but his learned friend undertook to reply to them.

"Now," said he, with an air of satisfaction, "the rest will all go by itself, for I have known Arabic thoroughly for thirty years or so and I am delighted to have a chance of speaking it. What shall I ask the little girl?"

"Her own story, and all about her mother and the frightful drama in which she had been mixed up, the name of her persecutor, the address of the house where she went when she came here—"

"Stop, stop! That is too much at once; I will begin at the beginning, and inquire about her origin and family."

Cambremer prepared to listen to the conversation, and more especially to the translation, upon which he relied.

Baïa having repeated her verses, had remained attentive. It was evident that her childish mind was at work trying to guess the meaning of the scene and what would follow.

The professor drew himself up, and after clearing his throat began to talk to her. He commenced a discourse in a solemn tone, and not without a little drawling. Cambremer, it need hardly be said, failed to understand a word. He distinguished a few sounds like those which had previously fallen on his ears but not one intelligible syllable.

While the Orientalist was talking, Baïa was devouring him with her eyes, and her childish features expressed great disturbance of mind.

After fully two minutes, during which he had expressed himself very slowly, Dom Dillenius became silent, and after making a sign to the chevalier, prepared to listen to the reply of the little girl whom he had questioned in such a learned fashion. However she did not evince any haste to answer him. She looked alternately at him and at Cambremer, as though to ascertain what they wished her to do. At last, however, she made up her mind, and in her turn began a lengthy recital; but, while Dom Dillenius had spoken with slow solemnity, she replied with remarkably vivacious rapidity.

As she went on with her story, the professor's face clouded, his lips became compressed, he stretched out his neck, and listened eagerly. It was evident that all his intelligence was on the stretch. Finally, when Baïa had finished, he blew his nose, pressed his hand to his head, raised his eyes to Heaven, and opened his mouth; but not a word came, and ultimately he fell into deep thought.

"Come, my dear master, I beg of you, relieve my mind!" said Cambremer; "translate to me all that she has just said to you."

"My friend," sighed Dom Dillenius, "I must make a painful confession."

"Explain yourself, for mercy's sake, for I am dying of impatience!"

"Alas! I cannot relieve your mind, for I did not understand the child."

"What? But that is impossible! You said that she spoke Arabic, and that you knew it thoroughly. Those were your very words."

"I do—but—still—"

"Then she does not speak Arabic?"

"Yes, I think she does; I am even quite sure of it; for here and there I caught words the terminations of which I recognised although she cut them off short."

"But you were saying just now that she expressed herself with perfect accuracy?"

"Just now she was repeating the first verse of the Koran, the 'fatha,' which she must have learned by heart, and which all Mussulmans, from Morocco to Persia, pronounce in the same manner, but now—"

"Well?"

"She is speaking the Arabic of the lower classes, some frightful jargon or other spoken at Tunis or Tangiers, and that is altogether another matter."

"What!" cried Cambremer, excitedly, "you who have been studying for thirty years cannot keep up a conversation in this cursed tongue? If that is all that your learning has done for you—"

However the chevalier stopped short on noting the mortification depicted on the old man's face. "Forgive me, my dear master," said he, in a milder tone; "but this fresh disappointment is such a cruel one."

"I can understand that, my child, I can understand that," stammered the Orientalist, more and more out of countenance; "but this comes from never leaving my study. I can translate the Koran or the 'Arabian Nights' rapidly without once referring to a dictionary, but the first sailor who passes by, if he has merely once cruised about the Levant, could understand this little girl's chattering better than I do."

"It is astonishing that there should be such a difference between written and spoken language."

"There is an enormous difference, my dear child; there are vowels that cannot be written, accent points that—all sorts of things—"

"And so," said Cambremer, bitterly, "I must give up the attempt, and renounce the hope that I had in you?"

"I will try once more," said the old man, shaking his head.

He did so, but the second attempt was no more successful than the first one. He hesitated more and more, and it was evident that Baïa did not understand him at all. Cambremer was in despair, when suddenly an idea occurred to him. "Well, if she does not understand you on account of the difference of pronunciation," said he, "she might perhaps be able to read your words, if you wrote them down."

"I doubt it," replied Dom Dillenius. "In the East, women don't learn to read; however we can try."

And, as a last experiment, he placed the Koran under Baïa's eyes. The little girl looked at it with some curiosity, but as though she had been looking at a picture-book, and it was evidently unintelligible to her.

"I told you so; she isn't able to read Arabic," sighed the Orientalist.

"Ah! it is written that we sha'n't find out anything," said Chevalier Casse-Cou, dejectedly.

"But it seems to me that we have found out something already."

"What is it?"

"We know her nationality, or, at all events, her religion. She would not know a 'sourate' of the Koran unless she were of the Mohammedan faith."

"That is not a sufficient indication. There are Mahomedans all over the old world."

"Well, I don't wish to make a positive statement," said Dillenius, timidly, "but I think that the Arabic which this little girl speaks is a Western dialect, one of the dialects spoken in the Barbary States."

"What does that matter? We are no better off for knowing that."

"But at the Royal Library we have a school of Interpreters, and perhaps—"

The Orientalist had hesitated in giving this information, for it implied a painful avowal. It compelled him to admit that there were people in Paris better qualified than he was to carry on a familiar conversation in the language to which he had devoted so many years. However, it was a revelation to Cambremer.

"You are right, my dear master," said he, rising suddenly, "and I will go at once to the Rue de Richelieu. And all the more readily," added he, as if to himself, "as I already have to go to the print department at the library."

Dom Dillenius was so overcome by his disappointment that he made no attempt to detain his former pupil. He limited himself to pressing his hand before turning to his books again, and a moment later the chevalier and Baïa were again on the Quai de l'Arsenal.

Cambremer did not select the shortest route in repairing to the Royal Library. He wished to utilise his day by showing the child as much of Paris as was possible, in order to increase the chances of her recognising her former abode.

He therefore proceeded to the Place de la Bastille, and then took the line of the boulevards. Baïa seemed glad to walk, and showed no signs of fatigue. Her friend was careful to make her notice everything that usually pleases a child of her age—the toy-shops and the sweet-shops and the booths in the open air—but she paid very little attention to them. The Boulevard du Temple, in which a permanent fair was then held, did not seem to attract her at all.

They reached the Gymnase without further incident, but at this point Baïa began to look about her with great attention.

It could not be the ex-Théâtre de Madame, which, since the Revolution of July, had become the Théâtre du Gymnase, that thus attracted Baïa's eyes. And yet she gazed with marked persistency at its monumental frontage. It was evident that she thought she had seen the huge pile with its big windows before, but it could not be that she had lived there on arriving in Paris.

Cambremer soon found an explanation of the curiosity Baïa had manifested as to the ugly peristyle. After examining it, she looked successively towards the Madeleine and towards the Bastille, and finally turned her back to the theatre. "This is a place she knows," thought the chevalier, who was following all her movements with the utmost attention.

He was evidently right, for after another moment's hesitation, the little

girl caught hold of his arm with extraordinary eagerness, and pointed to a small street which opened upon the boulevard just in front of the theatre.

Cambremer seldom came to this neighbourhood, which was a long way from his own abode, and he had not been there since his last visit to M. Bousenna. However, it seemed to him that he recognised the house where the banker's office was situated. It was a large building facing the boulevard, and had a narrow street on each side of it. That on the right hand was the one which Baïa pointed at.

Although it appeared to him very unlikely that the child had been brought there by Biroulas, who had lived near the Barrière, the chevalier did not wish to neglect so precious an indication. So he crossed the boulevard which at that time was not macadamized, being merely roughly paved. However, some magnificent trees, which subsequent revolutions afterwards did away with, spread their branches almost into the shops, and Cambremer had some difficulty in reading the inscription at the corner of the little street. It was on a yellow ground and was badly weather-stained.

Finally he deciphered the inscription as "Rue Sainte Barbe," a name which did not recall anything to his mind. But Baïa still pulled his sleeve, and her persistence evidently had some meaning. So Cambremer allowed her to pull him along into the little street.

It was no better than a lane between two blocks of houses, and had but a doubtful right to be classified as a street. The broken pavement recalled the waves of the sea, and there was mud everywhere. As for the houses, they would have delighted a water-colour painter and disgusted a municipal official, for there was no uniformity about them, and they projected or retreated in the most picturesque fashion.

A variety of dirty linen hung from the narrow windows pierced in the old walls, and on the sills of the garret casements there were boxes which testified to the partiality of the dwellers for what is known as window-gardening.

In the way of shops, there were only some sheds, inside which one could see an odd collection of articles, such as old iron, odd volumes of books, and old clothes. One could not help wondering what customers could patronise the dealers who had installed themselves in a street where no one passed unless to call upon some persons living there. And the latter were few in number, to judge by the small number of doors upon either side of the dirty lane.

Half-way along this narrow byeway, at some thirty paces from the boulevard, Baïa suddenly stopped before a house, the greyish front of which bulged out, looking as though it would some day tumble down into the street. Above a passage there, the door of which stood open, was the following inscription, half-effaced by the rain: "Furnished rooms and offices to let."

The house upon which this inviting notice figured was certainly not of a kind to attract respectable applicants. It looked as though it were meant for that portion of the population which lives from hand to mouth and hires lodgings by the night. Consequently Cambremer could scarcely believe that the charming woman of whom he had caught a glimpse in the box at the Odéon had spent even an hour in such a hovel. But Baïa's gestures were such as to put an end to his doubts. The poor child was wiping big tears from her cheeks, and, firmly grasping her protector's hand, she tried to pull him into the house.

It was difficult to express more clearly that she recognised with painful

emotion the place where her poor mother had stopped on arriving in Paris, and that she even had the hope of finding her there.

On reflection, moreover, it was quite possible that Biroulas, in order the better to conceal himself, had chosen a low den of this kind, situated at a long distance from the place where he carried on his nefarious practices.

The chevalier, therefore, decided to enter the hovel. He was as much agitated as Baïa as he groped his way along the passage, but he nevertheless endeavoured to remain calm, for he felt that he might need all his composure. When he reached the end of the dark passage he saw a reddish light on his left, and suddenly heard a hoarse voice call out, "What is it that you want?"

Cambremer protruded his head to see who had called to him. However, he did not distinguish anyone or anything, though the strong smell and the ruddy light indicated that some unsavoury mess was in course of preparation.

"T'ain't the fringe-maker on the third floor, is it?" resumed the person who had already spoken.

This time the chevalier realised that the agreeable voice belonged to a woman, and he made a step forward to enter her retreat. But he was hailed by a horrible mewing, and the woman angrily exclaimed: "Take care: you'll tread on Mistigris."

Mistigris was a cat, whose eyeballs glared in the darkness, as if to complete the resemblance of the place to a witch's cave.

"Madame," began Cambremer, "I have called to ask you for some information about one of your former lodgers."

"Well, if you think that I remember all the folks as have stopped here, you're quite wrong, my fine sir."

After giving this scarcely encouraging reply, the woman came forward with her hands on her hips, and tried to distinguish the face of the intruder who had disturbed her while she was preparing her stew.

Cambremer was greatly puzzled as to what he should next say. He did not wish to let the virago know his plans, and he feared that he might question her too pointedly.

"It is about one of my friends," said he, trying to speak in a careless tone; "a friend who came here two or three weeks ago with a lady and a little girl."

The chevalier thought that he was proceeding very cunningly, and he confidently awaited the woman's reply.

"A lady!" she repeated, "oh! we don't have ladies to lodge here." However, in spite of this assertion, she almost immediately added: "What's his name? what's the gentleman's name?"

Cambremer hesitated for an instant, but there was no way of drawing back now, and so he replied with composure: "He is a merchant from the country named Monsieur Biroulas."

The hag bounded back, and, instead of replying, leant over her stove with an amount of vivacity which no one would have thought her capable of displaying. When she raised herself erect, she held a candle in her hand, and the chevalier could see the features of this female Cerberus. As he glanced at her, he immediately regretted having said so much. Never was a more hideous creature seen clothed in filthier garments. The most striking feature of her pock-marked face was a hooked nose like the beak of a bird of prey; as for her dress it was a miscellaneous bundle of rags of divers colours.

She stared at Cambremer with eyes as round and as fixed in their gaze as those of a night-hawk, and she had not yet caught sight of the child, who was clinging timidly to her guardian. However, Baïa made a motion which brought her into sight, and the hag then gave vent to a sort of growl, which she immediately tried to dissemble by turning it into a fit of coughing.

"Baroulas—Bitoulas !" she mumbled. "I don't know him—never heard of him at all."

Cambremer had no further doubts ; the hag's ill-disguised embarrassment proved that she was perfectly well acquainted with the man, whose name she pretended not to remember.

"Think again," said he, in a decided tone ; "I am sure that my friend stopped here, and I have made up my mind to find him."

The hag thereupon gave him a piercing glance, and asked, lowering her voice : "Hasn't he got any name but that, this friend of yours ?"

There was no mistaking the aim of this insinuation, and, however little Cambremer might know of the habits of thieves and smugglers, he guessed at once that Biroulas's accomplices must make use of a password, and that this word was what the hag was asking for. But he was, of course, unable to give it, and he began to realise that he had gone to work the wrong way. It was not by urging the old witch, that he could learn anything from her.

To have gone for a commissary of police, would have been the simplest course ; but how could he make the commissary understand the situation ? How persuade him that the vague indications given by a child unable to speak a word of French had any serious value, when brought to bear upon the strange behaviour of the old woman ? If Baïa had been able to explain herself, things would have assumed a different aspect at once, and her guardian appropriately remembered just then that he was on the way to find an interpreter at the Royal Library, and might easily bring one back with him.

"No, madame, I don't know of any other name that my friend may go by," said he to the hag, "and I may possibly have made a mistake in coming here to find him. I was told that he lived in a little street in front of the Gymnase, and—"

"There is the Rue Saint Etienne, quite near," growled the old woman.

"Well, I'll try there," said Cambremer, and thereupon he led the child—who had not stirred, during this conversation, from the room.

It is needless to say that he did not think of going to make any inquiries in the adjoining street, but climbed at once with Baïa into the first hack he caught sight of, calling out to the driver. "Take me to the Rue de Richelieu, and pull up at the Royal Library !"

If he had looked out at the cab window, he would have seen the old hag creeping along close to the walls, and looking after the vehicle, to see what direction it took. But Cambremer was impatiently tossing about on the cushions. On taking the resolution to find an interpreter, he knew that the success of his project depended upon the rapidity with which everything was accomplished. However, it would not require much time to go to the Rue de Richelieu, and return to the old hag's house, calling at a commissary's office on the way, and so the chevalier relied upon clearing up a portion of the mystery before the day was over.

Baïa seemed sad and thoughtful, either because she guessed what was going on, or because she was depressed by the remembrances which must have

been aroused in her mind at sight of the dingy house in the Rue Sainte Barbe.

The cab, it happened, rolled along at a fair pace, and the ride was soon at an end. The first face that Cambremer caught sight of as he alighted at the door of the library was that of one of his old friends. This friend happened to be one of the custodians of the print department, so that the meeting was a fortunate one.

"What! is it you, Francis?" he cried, holding out his hand, "what the mischief has brought you to us?"

"My dear friend, it is Heaven that has sent me to you," replied the chevalier, after helping Baïa to alight.

"Well, I am at your service, my friend: are you going to show the library to this charming little girl? The books and manuscripts won't interest her; but we have the two large globes by Coronelli, the bronze Parnassus by Titon du Tillet, without counting the beautiful medals and our twelve hundred thousand engravings—"

Cambremer hastily interrupted this enumeration, which threatened to include all the treasures of the immense establishment in the Rue de Richelieu. "That isn't what I have come here for," said he. "Will you tell me where I can find the Oriental School, which is annexed to the library?"

"The Oriental School? You mean the school for gentlemen studying the Oriental languages, and desirous of becoming interpreters?"

"Yes, yes; I am looking for some one who is able to understand and speak Arabic."

"Well, dear friend, you have come at a bad time."

"How's that?"

"Well, you see, the thing is this way: Last year, when the government organised the expedition to Algiers, they took almost all our young men away to use them as interpreters. The consulate service, and the ports of the Levant have taken away the rest; so that the school is almost entirely broken up."

"But there are the professors."

"Well, some of them have also gone to Algiers; others have taken a holiday, which will last till the re-opening of the school, and I don't really know whether you could find a single one in all Paris."

Cambremer remained silent, for he was overwhelmed by this last mishap, and, indeed, he looked so disappointed that his friend tried to console him. "As Arabic is so necessary to your happiness, my dear Francis," said he, "I will give you the addresses of all our Orientalists, and after all, you will be unlucky, indeed, if you don't find one of them, at least, at home."

"Quick, quick, then! for I have not a moment to lose."

"Well, to shorten the matter, then, come with me to the print department, it is only two steps off, on the ground floor; I must have a list of the professors' names on my desk, and we shall find it immediately."

"Come!" said the chevalier, urging little Baïa, who, in order to keep up with him, had to run as fast as her feet could carry her.

The chevalier's obliging friend took them into the little room where he worked, close to the department which he superintended. Above a table, strewn with papers and engravings, there was a large placard fixed to the wall, and covered with names and addresses that were rapidly read, but not without a few remarks. "This one went to the country last year,

under pretence of getting away from the Revolution, and he hasn't returned. That one has just been made inspector of something or other, and must have left Paris. That one may be here, but he doesn't speak Arabic, although he translates it admirably."

"Yes, yes, I know, I know," muttered Cambremer, remembering his visit to Dom Dillenius.

"I only see two who might answer your purpose," resumed the superintendent, placing his finger upon the two names, one after the other.

The addresses were appended below them, and the chevalier quickly turned to the table to note them down. But the pen which he had taken up to do so suddenly fell from his hand, and he uttered an exclamation which made the superintendent look round.

"What is that?" inquired Cambremer, in a trembling voice, as he pointed to an engraving which lay with several others upon the table.

"Oh! that's an engraving from a folio which forms part of the La Vallière collection."

"Do you know what it represents?"

"An old château in France. We have a collection of etchings which includes almost all the castles and keeps."

"Can you tell me the name of this one?"

The chevalier was so pale, and looked so anxious that his friend, before replying, asked him what was the matter.

"It would take too long to tell you all," replied Cambremer. "The life of this child and mine are involved in all this. In the name of friendship, put an end to my uncertainty."

"I am only too happy to be useful to you, my dear Francis," said the superintendent. "Let us look at this interesting picture."

Cambremer watched him with feverish interest as he turned the engraving from side to side, and finally brought it so close to his face that he seemed to be smelling it. "The deuce!" he exclaimed, after a moment's examination, which seemed very long to the chevalier, "there isn't a word, no title—nothing—so I don't see how we can find out what it is. But, yes! now I think of it, there must be the list, the classification."

"The classification! What do you mean?"

"The division of course—the division of the portfolio which contains this series—into provinces and districts. Everything is in good order here, and our catalogue is almost up to date."

"Pray look at it at once, then!"

"Immediately, my dear friend, immediately. Ah! here is the general list: 'Forts and châteaux of France.' Our engraving here is from the third parcel which is entitled—"

Cambremer was wild with impatience, while the superintendent searched through the immense portfolio from which he had chanced that morning to draw the famous etching. "The title—the title—I cannot find the title," he said. "Our scribes are so careless that we really ought to do all the work ourselves."

"What! is there nothing?"

"Ah, yes, here it is. I have it! Take it and read it, my dear Francis."

The chevalier eagerly seized hold of the parchment envelope which his friend held out to him, and read these words written in large letters: "Western region.—Brittany, Vendée and Saintonge."

"That is somewhat vague," remarked the superintendent, "still it is something, especially as this writing evidently dates from the seventeenth

century, and consequently the classification was made at the time when the collection was formed."

"The West! But that is impossible!" muttered Cambremer, who could not see any connection between Baïa's Arab origin and the western shores of France.

"Well, look here, to convince you, just turn over the etchings that come before and after it. Here are some old drawbridges which seem to belong to the Château of Brest—you can espy the roads in the distance; and look at this! Ah! this time here's something I recognise perfectly: it is the tower of the Solidor, at Saint Servan."

"That is true," replied the chevalier, who, as a native of Saint Malo, could not be mistaken.

"Well, this is evidently Brittany then," resumed the librarian; "and all we now have to do is to find out the exact site of the castle which interests you so much. In two or three days' time, I shall be able to tell you all about it."

"I wish I could rely upon that."

"You may; here is something calculated to remove my last doubt if I had any. Do you see those huge blocks of stone in the foreground on the left?"

"Yes."

"And doesn't your Breton heart beat at the sight of a Druidical monument?"

"You are right; that is really a dolmen, and I can't imagine how I failed to notice it."

"Well, your château is situated in the midst of a vast plain, and it isn't far from the coast. I only need to glance at the sea-birds flying across the sky."

"Oh! that's a bit of artistic fancy."

"Not at all, my dear friend. At the time when this etching was made artists were conscientious fellows and they wouldn't have put sea-gulls into a sky unless birds of that description frequented the part."

Cambremer was beginning to think that he would, perhaps, arrive at full enlightenment, thanks to the reasoning of his friend, whose deductions resembled those which the Mohicans derive from the footprints of their enemies. However, the most urgent matter at that moment was to find an interpreter, and the chevalier almost regretted having spent the last three quarters of an hour in trying to obtain incomplete information. So he took leave of his friend, asking him not to lose sight of the matter, and promising to see him again very soon. The superintendent was longing to make his old friend Francis talk and to ask him to explain the motives for this strange search, but he did not venture to do so, and decided to defer the gratification of his curiosity until they met again. He contented himself with accompanying Cambremer to the door of the library, and wishing him good luck. He was not sure, in point of fact, whether his poor friend was perfectly sane.

The professors, whose addresses he had given to Cambremer, lived in a remote part of the Quartier Latin, and the cab conveying the chevalier and his little charge went rapidly down the Rue de Richelieu. This long thoroughfare was then almost as crowded as it is nowadays, and on arriving at the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs, the vehicle was stopped by a block.

Cambremer popped his head out of the door, called to the driver,

shouted to the other jehus, swore and raged away, but all in vain. The block only went on increasing, all the side streets were closed up, and it was clear that half-an-hour would elapse before they could resume their journey.

Patience was not the greatest of the chevalier's virtues. He leapt out of his cab, took Baïa in his arms, threw a crown to the driver, and then hurried onward towards the steps leading down into the Rue Montpensier, with the intention of crossing the galleries of the Palais Royal and taking another cab in the Rue St. Honoré. At the entrance of the palace there were a few stands at which some unlucky dealers had a few trifling objects for sale. Cambremer would certainly not have noticed them had not Baïa suddenly turned round on hearing one of the poor devils call out what he had for sale.

Cambremer turned when she did and looked at the vendor. He was a tall young man, amazingly thin, as dark as a mulatto, and fairly shaking with cold under a thin and ragged woollen cloak. Before him he had a little low table upon which sweetmeats of a peculiar colour were displayed while two little bits of burning incense diffused an aromatic smell around.

"Halaouate! Halaouate!" called this singular-looking fellow, in a melancholy voice.

No one stopped before his stand, however, and the other dealers, to make fun of him, were amusing themselves by imitating his lamentable cry. Under any other circumstances, Cambremer would have been touched by the sight of so much misery, and would have given some money to the poor devil who was thus making himself hoarse to no purpose. But he had very different matters in his mind for the moment, and he certainly would not have stopped at all had not Baïa been so persistent.

The child pulled his arm, as she had done at the entrance of the Rue Sainte Barbe, whereupon he fancied that she wished to taste the uninviting sweetmeats which lay on the stand amid a variety of exotic perfumery. The moment seemed to him ill chosen for the purchase, but it was the first time that the dear little creature had expressed a wish, and he would not thwart her. So he walked with her to the stand, and the vendor, elated at the pleasant prospect of selling something, continued giving vent to his plaintive cry.

Cambremer was about to ask the price of the sweetmeats, when to his great surprise, Baïa began to talk to the dealer in the language which had for so long been the despair of her guardians. The young fellow's face thereupon lighted up, and he ceased uttering his doleful cry to listen to what the child was saying.

The chevalier's heart beat fast, and he saw a gleam of hope ahead. All at once, the dealer caught hold of the little girl's hand, bent down to kiss it, and then, raising himself erect again, he began to talk with extraordinary rapidity. Baïa jumped for joy, clapped her hands, and every instant interrupted the man whom she and her guardian had so unexpectedly fallen in with.

"They understand one another!" muttered Cambremer, so delighted that tears came into his eyes.

It was true; they were exchanging words and ideas. One word led to another; each question was immediately followed by a reply. What all the learning of the retired professor, who for thirty years had been bending over the Koran, had failed to accomplish, the common language of a dealer in seraglio pastilles was rapidly effecting.

The poor chevalier was only too happy. There was, however, still something missing. If this famished-looking, itinerant dealer only spoke Arabic, the difficulty would be the same. An interpreter would be as much needed for the man as for the child; however, Cambremer did not long remain in doubt.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the dealer, in excellent French, "but I can translate to you what the young lady has just told me."

"Did you come from her country?"

"Oh! I come from Tripoli, and she speaks a more western dialect, but I understand it perfectly well."

If Casse-Cou had only listened to his impatience, he would then and there have cleared up the questions which were troubling him so much, but the place was ill suited for the purpose. The poor dealer's rivals were so unaccustomed to see anyone speaking with him that they had left their own stands to listen to the conversation that was going on. Cambremer at once realised that it would be imprudent to say anything in presence of such an audience.

"Can you come with me for the rest of the day?" he asked. "I will recoup you for your loss of time."

"Oh, I can come with pleasure, sir; and I sha'n't lose anything by doing so, for I don't do much business." And thereupon the poor fellow, fastening his tray about his neck, set out towards the garden of the Palais Royal with the chevalier.

Baïa seemed all joy, her eyes shone brightly, and her lips murmured words which the dealer listened to with a smile. It was evident that an explanation was forthcoming, and that the mystery would be cleared up at last.

Cambremer was almost overcome; he felt absolutely faint, and could not speak. However, he finally mastered his emotion, and when they had reached the avenue on the right-hand side of the garden, he stopped under the trees, appropriated some chairs, made Baïa sit down, seated himself and motioned to the dealer to do the same. It was no longer necessary to run after professors, at the risk of again being disappointed; and since Heaven had sent the dear child an interpreter, Cambremer did not wish to lose a moment in profiting by this unexpected good fortune.

The dealer made a few ceremonious objections, and would not sit down till he had been repeatedly urged to do so. At that season, and in the foggy weather that prevailed, the garden of the Palais Royal was but little frequented, so that they could speak without the least fear of being overheard.

"My friend," said the chevalier, "the service which I have to ask of you is one which cannot be easily repaid, and if you will enter my service, I can assure you that you will not regret it."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed the dealer, "I am very poor, but I assure you that I am well rewarded in having the pleasure of speaking my native tongue with this child. If you only knew what it is to hear the language of one's own country when one is far away from it!"

"But you speak French as well as though you had been born in Paris," Cambremer could not help replying.

"Oh, I was educated at Alexandria by the Lazarist Fathers, and I was dragoman at the consulate when, eight months ago, I received orders to come to France. There was a lack of interpreters for the expedition to Algiers, and they wanted to send me there. But I reached Paris on the day after the Revolution of July, and couldn't find anyone to apply to at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

"But since then you must have been able to make yourself known, have you not?"

"Well, since then I have been repulsed everywhere; the Government no longer needs any interpreters, my consul has been changed, and has never replied to the letters which I wrote to him. What more need I say? In a short time I exhausted all my resources and fell into the utmost distress."

"I will make amends for all that," exclaimed Cambremer.

"Poor Kaddour thanks you, sir, and will serve you till death," said the dealer, stooping to kiss his protector's hand, as is the Arab custom.

However, the chevalier prevented him from carrying his act of homage into effect, and began to speak of what interested him above all things else. If he had ventured to ask a few preliminary questions as to the origin and position of the interpreter thus sent him by chance, it was only because he had become mistrustful. He had escaped so many traps that he seemed to see Biroulas's agents everywhere, and he did not wish to speak of his secrets till he knew to whom he was talking.

However, this time his odious enemy could not have guessed that he would happen to enter the Palais Royal, and it was certainly not he who had stationed this dealer in sweetmeats under the entrance.

"My friend," said Cambremer, "you guessed just now what I require of you. You must ask this little girl to tell you her story, and you must immediately relate it to me."

Kaddour obeyed at once. He addressed a few short questions to Baïa, and the child answered with a readiness which showed her desire to relate everything. At the expiration of a few minutes, during which the child spoke on without a pause, the interpreter made a sign to her to stop. He wished to proceed methodically, so as not to omit any portion of her narrative.

"The young lady's story is very extraordinary," said he to Cambremer; "she tells me that she passed her infancy in a château where she was shut up with her mother, and where she never saw anyone."

"But where is this château?"

"On the seashore, and in a cold country; that is all that she knows about it. I will question her again."

And then the conversation in Arabic was once more resumed.

"One day," resumed the interpreter, after listening again, "a man whom she had never seen, and who frightened her very much, came to the château. He made her get into a carriage with her mother, and they drove away very fast, and after travelling two days they reached Paris. They then went to a very ugly house, where they only remained one day. In the evening, the man took them to a great hall where there was a deal of light and a great many people. Then, this same man took her away alone, promising her to buy her some cakes, but he left her in a dark and lonely street, where she was found by some one—probably by yourself, sir."

"However," exclaimed Cambremer, who had virtually received no enlightenment from this narrative, as he had already been acquainted with all these facts. "However, she must be aware of the reasons that existed for this journey. She must know what connection there was between this man and her mother."

"I will question her again," replied Kaddour. And after a fresh exchange of questions and answers, he resumed: "Her mother had never spoken to her about the man; but she had often told her that their life would change, that they would go and lead a happy life in the land of the

sun ; in fact, when they went away from the old château, she seemed very glad to leave it. She talked with the man in a language which the young lady didn't understand ; probably it was French."

"Does she know what the monster did with her mother?" asked the chevalier, lowering his voice, as though he feared that Baïa might understand him.

"No, she doesn't know what has become of her mother, and she is grieved not to see her. But she hopes that she will soon meet her, for, just now, while she was with you, she found the house where she stayed on her arrival in Paris."

"One word more," said Cambremer, who had made up his mind to act at once and to defer fuller explanations until the following day ; "how is it that she speaks Arabic although she was brought up in France?"

"She has a faint remembrance," replied the interpreter, after asking a few brief questions, "of having formerly lived in a country where the sky was always blue ; she resided in a great palace, where there were flowers and water, and she also remembers a long sea-voyage."

"She must have been brought to Brittany from some Eastern city, then," said the chevalier, talking to himself. "Well, I know enough, and we haven't a moment to lose. My friend," he added, addressing Kaddour, "you must come with me, and from this time forth you mustn't leave me."

The Arab again took up his shabby tray and walked on behind Cambremer, who strode towards the Place du Palais Royal. On arriving there, the chevalier, the interpreter, and the little girl hastily entered a cab. The plan which Cambremer had devised, consisting in repairing as speedily as possible to the Rue Sainte Barbe, in catching the horrible hag and proving her falsehoods, and then keeping his eye upon her, while Kaddour went for the police.

In less than a quarter of an hour the cabman, urged on by the promise of a handsome gratuity, conveyed them to the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle. It then took but a few seconds for Cambremer to alight from the vehicle and proceed along the Rue Sainte Barbe at a run. He realised that despatch was of paramount importance, and so he took Baïa in his arms in order not to lose any time. Kaddour followed with his tray. His strange dress and face made some of the passers-by turn round, and the noise of the cab pulling up attracted two or three inquisitive persons to the few windows overlooking the street.

The passage into which the chevalier soon plunged had remained open, and it was as gloomy as on the occasion of his first visit. At the further end, however, Cambremer no longer espied the ruddy glow which had previously guided him, nor did anyone step forth to question him. It was he this time who meant to do the loud talking, and he unceremoniously pushed open the door of the hole in which he had previously found the old hag. Two smouldering logs still lay upon the hearth ; the pot was no longer boiling, but it still emitted the nauseous stench of the half-cooked stew. Surprised by this loneliness and silence, Cambremer began to stamp his feet, and this noisy summons led to an assault which he had not anticipated.

The cat, Mistigris, the sole inhabitant of the lonely hole, suddenly flew at his legs, and then darted to the stairs and took up a position upon the third step. Kaddour came in at the very moment when the animal had gathered itself together, extending its claws, and beginning to sing the war-song of its species.

"The old hag has gone !" muttered the chevalier.

"She is perhaps in the house," sagaciously remarked the Arab.

Cambremer already had a feeling that the sudden disappearance of the frightful old doorkeeper foreboded some misfortune. The old witch had certainly not deserted her cooking without some important motive, and, indeed, the reason of her absence was self-evident. "I said too much," thought Baïa's protector. "When I came here just now, she mistrusted me, and so she has gone to warn Biroulas. No matter; I'll find out something more. By searching this den from top to bottom, I shall end by discovering some one to talk to."

With this resolve he left the hag's apartment with the little girl, and began to climb the stairs.

Mistigris had assumed the semi-mournful, semi-threatening attitude of a sphinx guarding an Egyptian necropolis, and his blazing eyeballs shone like two glow-worms. He at first attempted to defend the passage, and when he finally left the place free to the intruders who were thus invading his domain, he gave a spiteful hiss and fled upstairs at one bound.

"Ask Baïa to show us the rooms where she stayed with her mother," said the chevalier to Kaddour, who was following him.

"Baïa!" murmured the poor interpreter, who had not previously heard the name of the child whose language he translated so perfectly. "Ah! once I had a sister whose name was Baïa."

Then, reverting to his humble functions, he again began to question the little girl in Arabic.

"It is on the first floor on the right," said he, after receiving the reply.

After a few more steps, the searchers reached a yellow painted door, in the middle of which appeared the number ONE. The landing was lighted by some grimy window-panes, through which there came a faint gleam from an inner courtyard. The walls were damp, and indescribable odds and ends littered the dirty floor. It was the same loathsome, wretched disorder as exists in the lodging-houses near the Barrière, and Cambremer's heart sank at the thought that Baïa and her mother had spent an entire day under such a roof.

He looked in vain for a bell, and on feeling the door with his hand, he found that there was a key in the lock. He knocked without obtaining any reply, and, as he was anxious to put an end to his uncertainty, he went in and found himself in a large tiled room, entirely unfurnished. Beyond this room came a veritable dormitory, that is to say, an apartment containing three beds set in a row. They were not occupied, however, and they were quite destitute of sheets, curtains, or blankets. However, on a round table in the middle of the room there were various materials and articles of female attire. Old shirts lay among pieces of velvet and silk, and here and there one caught a glimpse of scissors, pins, reels of thread, and similar objects. This was evidently a dressmaker's working-room, but there was no one there, and Cambremer was beginning to think that he had made a mistake when he saw Baïa throw herself, weeping, upon one of the three beds. It was evidently the one upon which her mother had slept during their short stay in the accursed house.

If the chevalier had felt any doubts on this point, they would have been removed by the answers which the poor child gave to the interpreter's questions. She explained to him amid her sobs that the furniture had been changed, with the exception of the beds, that there had been sofas and hangings about the room, whereas now there were only some straw-bottomed chairs and the bare walls.

The crime at the Odéon had evidently been followed by the removal of all articles of value from the rooms, which had no doubt been engaged, and made ready expressly to receive the poor woman pending an opportunity to make away with her.

Cambremer wandered about in sad perplexity among the divers objects which filled the room. Suddenly, near one of the windows, he caught sight of a piece of furniture at that time seldom seen. It was a long rose-wood box with four bamboo legs, and it was full of soil. In this "jardinière" as one would say now-a-days, there was a plant the leaves of which were of a brilliant green and the flowers of a vivid red. The chevalier started and gave vent to a cry of astonishment, as he recognised them. He had seen a similar flower in the hand of the wretched woman whom he had followed from the Odéon to Frascati's, and who, from time to time, confronted him like an evil genius, and yet always escaped him.

Just as he was about to cull one of the flowers to use it as a proof, if necessary, the door was suddenly opened, and a sharp voice exclaimed: "Well, make yourself at home! What do you mean by all this?"

A tall, scraggy, wrinkled woman had come in, followed by two girls wearing white caps, who seemed to be her apprentices.

"Aglaré, my dear," said this disagreeable-looking female, "go down and tell the doorkeeper that there are some suspicious people in the work-room."

"But, madame, you mistake my intentions," hastily rejoined Cambremer, to quiet the annoying zeal with which the dressmaker's assistant darted towards the stairs.

"What—mistake?" began the lodger, "what have you come to my rooms for, with that long-legged fellow in a masquerade dress?"

"Madame," resumed the chevalier, in a very decided tone, "I must ask you to listen to me instead of shouting, for what I have to say is very serious."

"What can you have to say then? Have you come to give me an order?"

"I have come to make investigations concerning a crime which was committed by some persons who hired this room before you did, and I summon you in the name of justice to answer my questions."

The chevalier's peremptory tone made some impression upon the dressmaker, who thought that she must be dealing with some judicial personage of high standing. "Indeed, sir," she stammered, "but I don't know anything about these persons; I hired the rooms a fortnight ago, and I paid a month's rent in advance; I'm not behindhand."

"And you never saw the persons who were here before you?"

"Never! All that I know is that they must have been people in easy circumstances for they left a stand here containing some lovely flowers, such as I never beheld before: you can see for yourself," added the woman, pointing to the camellia which Cambremer held in his hand.

This was said with an air of such good faith that the chevalier felt no doubt as to how everything had happened. That frightful old hag of a doorkeeper was evidently one of Biroulas's acolytes, and the apartments on the first floor must have been prepared by her as a temporary abode for the victims whom her employer had brought to Paris.

"Well, madame," said Cambremer, in a milder tone, "I believe you, and I only have a few more questions to ask. Will you give me the address of the landlord, for I suppose this is a furnished lodging-house?"

"Furnished, if you choose to call it so," said the dressmaker. "However, when I arrived here, the only furniture I found was those three bedsteads. As for the landlord, I never even heard his name; I only know the doorkeeper, who is the principal tenant."

"What is her name?"

"Mother Hippolyte. That is the signature which she wrote on my receipt."

"Couldn't I see her?" said Cambremer, hoping to obtain a reply which might be turned to good use.

"Well, I think that she will soon return; she went out at least two hours ago, without saying where she was going, and it's strange that she isn't back as yet. She doesn't like to leave her cat alone for any length of time."

While asking the foregoing questions the chevalier had reflected. He realised that if he persevered in these tactics he would not learn anything of importance, and that it would be best to go straight to the district commissary of police, and tell him everything. He thought that with such precise testimony as Baïa's and Kaddour's interpretation thereof, he could induce the official to accompany him to the Rue Sainte Barbe and make thorough inquiries.

As for the frightful doorkeeper, even if she did not return to her room downstairs, she might be found somewhere, and it was urgent that a search should be made to discover her whereabouts. Cambremer accordingly took leave of the dressmaker, who accompanied him to the landing with a great display of politeness, for she sincerely believed that she had just had to deal with an important personage.

"My friend," now said the chevalier to Kaddour, "we must go at once to the commissary of police, and I rely upon you to repeat what this child has told us."

"I am at your orders, sir," replied the interpreter, quietly.

However, the chevalier and Baïa, who were walking in advance, had not taken three steps in the street before a loud crash, followed by a sharp cry, abruptly made them turn round.

Cambremer stood mute with horror. The unfortunate Kaddour lay almost at his feet in a pool of blood. An immense box, full of soil and flowers, had fallen from the third floor upon the Arab's head and crushed his skull. At this frightful sight, Baïa uttered a scream, and hid her face in her hands, while the chevalier darted towards the poor interpreter to raise him up.

But all help was unavailing, for the unlucky fellow's brain was visible through a great gaping wound, and all life had departed from his eyes. Cambremer had great difficulty in removing the soil and wood-work, beneath which Kaddour was lying, and he stained his hands with blood in propping the poor interpreter up against the wall. He then called to him several times, and the dying man's lips parted as if to reply to him; however, they only breathed a deep sigh. It was his last.

When the chevalier saw that nothing could restore the poor Arab, who had shown such devotion, to life again, he uttered a cry of despair and rage. The thought that he was the indirect cause of the interpreter's tragical demise, drove him almost to madness. He rose up, raised his eyes to Heaven, and shook his fist at the fatal house. He had almost forgotten Baïa, who was sobbing in the middle of the street, where a large number of sightseers had now collected, the people passing along the boulevard being attracted by the sight of the little girl's grief.

However, as the chevalier looked up, he thought that he saw a head peer forth above the window-sill of the third floor. It disappeared so quickly that the chevalier had not time to see whether it was the head of a man or of a woman, still he at once conjectured whom the stealthy observer might be.

After all the strange events which had occurred during the previous three weeks, he no longer believed in accidents. In his eyes, Kaddour's death had been neither more nor less than a premeditated crime, and the person who had peered from the eaves into the street, could only be the murderer looking out to see the effect of his work. If Cambremer had listened only to impulse, he would have at once rushed after the scoundrel who had the impudence to feast his eyes upon such a sight. But his little charge was there exposed to the idlers whom the occurrence had drawn together. He could not leave her; still less could she accompany him on the search which he longed to make for the murderer.

However, amid his perplexity, Heaven sent him some help on which he had not counted. Among those who had run up, on hearing Baïa scream, he saw Paul Vernier, whom he recognised with indescribable satisfaction. "Ah, my friend!" said he, in a broken voice; "it was Heaven that sent you here."

"What has happened?" asked the young man, greatly disturbed by the spectacle before him. "Monsieur Bousenna dismissed me for the day, and I was passing this street when I saw every one running this way. What is all this blood? Whose body is this?"

"I haven't time at present to explain this fresh horror to you," hurriedly replied the chevalier; "but I must confide our dear child to you. Watch over her, don't leave her for a moment, while I pursue our implacable foes."

Paul had not the courage to ask any further questions, he took Baïa by the hand, and went with her towards the boulevard. The little girl was so terrified by the sight of the disfigured body of Kaddour, that she followed her new guide without evincing the least resistance.

In less than a minute the throng had greatly increased, and the Rue Sainte Barbe, usually such a lonely street, could scarcely contain the people who crowded into it. The first arrivals had rushed up to the poor Arab, and indulged in the idle bustle which is characteristic of crowds. Some shouted for a doctor; others discussed the cause of the accident; while the greater number called upon the police to interfere, according to the usual practice of the Parisians. However, no one did anything to the point; and if the unfortunate Kaddour had had any breath left him, it would have had time to leave his body ten times over before anybody would have offered any useful assistance.

Meanwhile, those idlers who were furthest away hustled those who were near, without knowing what the matter was since they could not see over their neighbours' heads; and to make the affair complete, the most absurd stories were already being related along the boulevard. There was a lot of talk about a plot, about a political conspiracy, about the arrest of an important personage, and a deal else, all utterly absurd.

However, Cambremer did not listen to this ridiculous talk, for as soon as he thought Baïa safe, he rushed into the passage with the impetuosity of a soldier charging the enemy. In making this furious rush, he upset the scraggy dressmaker who had come down from her work-room, drawn by the noise outside; and it was amidst the abuse of her assistants that he flew up the

first steps of the staircase. He knew from which floor the flower-box had fallen, and he did not think that he should have any difficulty in finding the room to which the window belonged.

He went up two flight of stairs without encountering any one, and on the third landing he found an open door outside which the infernal Mistigris was standing with his back up and swearing the most unearthly oaths in cat-language. It was evident that he was quite at home, and was protesting against the invasion of an apartment where he had a right to remain. Although busy with thoughts of vengeance, Cambremer did not fail to notice this circumstance, and he did not doubt for an instant but what the old witch's familiar had some acquaintance with the lodger on the third floor. He gave Mistigris a hard kick, which elicited a most atrocious mewing, and then passed through the doorway.

He found himself in a work-girl's room; the kind of garret of which Béranger has sung the praises, with an iron bedstead, some stockings and petticoats drying on a line, some flowers fading in a water-jug, some caps strewn over rush-seated chairs. However, the chevalier paid no attention to these domestic details. He at once hastened to the window which had remained open, and he saw at a glance that the box could not have fallen by accident. Some severed wire was still hanging to the water-spout, and on inspection it seemed evident that it had been cut with a strong pair of scissors.

Accordingly, the amiable lodger must have lain in wait in this garret watching for the departure of Biroulas's enemies, and the projectile had been launched into space with the hope of killing all three of them. If there had been any choice, Cambremer and Baïa would undoubtedly have been selected as the preferable victims; however, they had escaped death by what truly seemed a miracle.

The chevalier reflected upon all this in less time than it takes to tell it, and he whisked about the room like a lion looking for the invisible hunter whose bullet has wounded it. What had become of the abominable wretch who had cut the wire securing the flower-box to the window-sill and the water spout? He could not have fled by the stairs, for Cambremer would have met him, unless, indeed, he had gone into one of the rooms on the second or third floor. This last hypothesis was worth verifying, and Baïa's protector was about to go downstairs again when he thought of looking upon the roof.

However, if, as seemed most likely, the murderer were a woman, it was not at all probable that she had retired by such a perilous route. Still, Cambremer, at all hazards, got upon a stool, and popped his head out of the garret-window. At first his eyes instinctively turned to the street where, fifty feet below him, the ever-swelling crowd was still congregated about the dead body. He could not see either Baïa or Paul Vernier, but he fancied that he caught sight of some silver braid on the three-cornered hats of a few gendarmes, and even of two or three firemen's helmets. However, he had no time to devote to incidental matters, and his attention was soon directed to the roof, which he thought might have been utilized by the murderer as a means of escape.

The window opened just above the cornice, at the point where the slate-covered slope ended; and above it there were still two rows of garret casements, without counting sundry skylights.

At first Cambremer did not see any living creature; but on looking more attentively he finally caught sight of somebody who was creeping along the upper arris of the roof. At the moment when he discovered this aerial

promenader, the latter's head disappeared behind a brickwork chimney-stack surmounted by pots and pipes of every imaginable shape and size. The person's legs then followed, but the chevalier had time to see that, judging by their attire, they belonged to an individual of the male sex.

Without feeling surprised at this unexpected discovery, and without thinking of the danger, Cambremer raised himself up on the window-sill, and boldly started after the fugitive.

In order to reach him, it was necessary first to reach the summit of the roof, and this was no easy task to a person who was not a professional slater. However, the chevalier had studied gymnastics well enough to risk the attempt. He stretched himself flat, and began to climb up by means of his elbows and knees. It did not take him more than two minutes to reach the summit of the roof, upon which he seated himself in horseback fashion.

From this high point he could overlook the whole roofing, and he saw that the main building, bordering the Rue Sainte Barbe, formed one side of a long parallelogram. An inner court formed the nucleus of the whole pile; and at thirty paces from him rose the chimney, behind which the fugitive had hidden. Cambremer accordingly bent down as well as he could, and began to crawl in that direction with infinite care. However, while he was thus dragging himself along, the stranger suddenly emerged from his hiding-place. He was standing up and looking about him, as though to find his way.

"It is he—or rather *she*!—the young man with the red flower!" exclaimed Cambremer.

The chevalier had done an imprudent thing. The exclamation which he had allowed to escape him had not been lost in the air.

At that height, the buzz of Paris is but faintly heard, and the wind, which was blowing towards the fugitive, carried him the words to which Cassc-Cou had given utterance in his mingled surprise and anger. On hearing them the spurious young man quickly turned round, but he did not attempt to hide behind the chimney again. Bending over as easily as a cat would have done, he began to crawl along the ridge of the roof.

Cambremer did the same. No hesitation was now possible. A regular pursuit was about to begin, and if a struggle took place it would be one of life or death.

A foggy moisture hung over Paris, and made the slates very slippery. No doubt, while the chase was confined to the ridge upon which it was easy to seat oneself, there was no great danger. But it was clear that the murderer or rather the murderess intended to take refuge in some open garret, and it was necessary to catch up with her, even at the risk of venturing upon the steepest inclines.

"Wretch!" muttered Cambremer, dragging himself along as fast as he could, "I have you this time, and I swear that you sha'n't escape me!"

The oath he thus took was not an easy one to keep, however, and the young woman gave no signs of fear. In fact, she gained considerably on her adversary, having the advantage of being both younger and lighter. Cambremer's long legs were in his way, and his heavy coat, which he had not taken off, hampered the rapidity of his movements; however, he did not dare to tarry to remove it for fear of losing time.

After ten minutes' effort he himself realised that, instead of gaining ground, he was losing it. The woman was reaching a point where two blocks of houses met, and she evidently wished to attain a long guttering which would enable her to descend to the edge of the roof. Mistigris, the

cat, must often have followed this route, which was certainly not intended for human beings. However, a certain garret-window, which was open near the cornice, and close to the guttering, seemed to be the fugitive's objective-point.

The question for the chevalier was to arrive in time to prevent the agile miscreant, whom he was pursuing, from entering this retreat, which could scarcely be attacked from the outside. So he redoubled his efforts, and gradually drew nearer and nearer. From the height at which he was dragging himself along, he could not espy the pavement of the courtyard, but he saw that from the upper floors on the other side of the quadrilateral some persons were gazing through the windows at his singular evolutions and those of his antagonist. They were, no doubt, supposed to be workmen looking out for repairs to be made, for the spectators did not seem to trouble themselves about them, nor did they even open their windows to have a better look.

Cambremer, for a moment, thought of calling out to these people, but he feared that he would not be understood at that distance, even if he were heard. It was hard, indeed, to relate on a roof all the crimes committed by the creature who was flying before him. It would be better to rely upon his address and the vigour of his muscles, at least for the time being—perhaps he might call for help at a more propitious moment.

He was growing accustomed to this kind of motion, and was now getting along quite fast. At last he saw the woman reach the water-spout, and prepare to go down. She turned round, clutched hold of the piping with her hands and knees, and let herself softly slide along.

Cambremer was now but ten paces from her, and the time she gave to preparations enabled him to come even nearer. He was at the top of the perilous route marked out by the piping before she had reached the garret-window. There was not a second to be lost, and, in his turn, he began to descend the spout. On turning his head he was able to distinguish the features of Biroulas's accomplice. She had the same hard though regular face, the same cold look in her bright black eyes which had so attracted his attention at the Odéon, and which he had again espied at the church and in the cemetery on the day of the funeral.

The feat he was now accomplishing was a dangerous one, and required as much agility as strength. However, Cambremer was sustained by the state of preternatural exaltation in which he found himself, and he did not acquit himself badly of his task. Unfortunately, however, the infernal creature was at least as skilful as he was, and he soon saw that she already had one hand on the ledge of the garret-window. One more effort, and she would catch on to it and enter the house. Once inside, she could easily escape by way of the staircase, and this was something which Cambremer wished to prevent, at all risks. However, he made a mistake in departing from the prudent slowness with which he had so far proceeded. On pressing a little less tightly with his knees so as to glide more quickly down the pipe, he lost his supporting point; and both hands also slipping, he was soon in terrible straits. He vainly tried to hold on with his nails, but the impulsion had been given, and his body with increasing rapidity sped past the garret-window at the very moment when the woman had succeeded in reaching it.

Being thus started, it seemed as if the unfortunate Cambremer must fall upon the pavement of the court-yard, and the terrible thought of inevitable, instantaneous death flashed upon him. But heaven wrought a

miracle in his favour: his fall was checked on the extreme edge of the cornice of the house. He remained supported on his stomach and elbows, and with his legs hanging over space.

In spite of the horrors of his situation he did not lose his presence of mind, but held on with the energy of despair. He experienced a sensation of numbness, such as a swimmer feels when chilled by water. It seemed to him as though a great weight rested upon the muscles of his arms, and that his chest would burst open. He realised, however, that if he could only rest one knee upon the cornice he would be safe; and he knew by long experience that cramp does not last long, and that the only remedy is complete immobility. So he ceased moving, and turned his head to see what had become of the woman.

It was with a feeling of genuine terror that at a few feet above him he espied the abominable creature's pale face. She had taken advantage of Cambremer's slip to glide in at the open window, and was now enjoying the sight of his misery. Standing inside the garret, sure of being able to fly whenever she pleased, she had rested her hands upon the window sill, above which her head projected, and she was quietly waiting to see her enemy die.

"Well, my fine chevalier," she said in a ringing voice, "you are in a nice situation."

Cambremer's only answer was a howl of rage.

"Confess that you would give a good deal at this moment to be safe at Widow Mongis's fireside." She enlivened this fiendish sarcasm by a cruel laugh and then resumed: "Aha! you see that I know the name of your good friends in the Rue Férou. I know a great deal more than that, and if you had time to listen, I could tell you a long story about your pet, Paul Vernier; but in four or five minutes at the most, you will have gone down on to the pavement to join the carcass of that fool whose business I settled just now."

"You murderess!" cried Cambremer.

"Oh! you may abuse me as much as you like. Say all you choose, my man; all your gabble won't prevent me from enjoying the sight of your death when you tumble over. That is as it ought to be, and it will teach you not to meddle with other people's business. If you hadn't poked your nose into what does not concern you, we should never have gone after you."

The chevalier was suffering indescribable martyrdom, for intense mental anguish was added to all his physical pain.

"It is a pity, isn't it," resumed his fiendish enemy—"it is a pity to be shattered to bits just as you fancied you would manage to annoy our friend Biroulas! You thought that you had done something grand when you got hold of that blackamoor to make that little fool Baïa talk! She's an orphan all over again, isn't she, my fine chevalier?"

A kind of rattle escaped from Cambremer's throat, and he spat in the face of the diabolical creature who was thus insulting him.

"You have grown very spiteful," said the fury, "and I think it is about time to leave you. Besides, I must go down to see the pieces of your valuable frame picked up. I've only two words more to say to you. You mustn't go to the other world without knowing what will happen to those in whom you are so greatly interested. Be easy, my friend! the Mongis woman and her goose of a daughter, the fool Cassonade and the simpleton Paul Vernier, will all go after you in three weeks' time at the most; and as for your dear little friend Baïa, I'll undertake to wring her neck myself."

The chevalier felt an acute pain, as though a knife had been plunged into his heart.

"Good night, Monsieur Francis Cambremer!" called out the satanic creature, as she finally decided to leave the window; "you won't get out of this mess as you got out of the vault."

As the chevalier saw her retire he felt that his last hope was dead. The numbness of his legs had left him almost entirely, but his strength was gone, and he felt that his stiffened arms were about to give way. He tried to look below him, and his hair rose on his head. Vertigo seized upon him—that madness of the abyss!

The depths below seemed to draw him down, and at moments he fancied that the house shook, and swung backwards and forwards over the void with his body. His blood rushed to his temples and clouded his sight, still his ears distinctly caught a confused sound of voices rising from the yard. The strange gymnastics in which he had been indulging on the edge of the roof had been noticed, and windows were opening on all sides.

Cambremer made one last effort to bring one of his knees to a level with the edge of the roof, but fatigue paralyzed this last attempt. He felt that he was lost, and closed his eyes to die!

At the moment, however, when he was about to let his stiffened fingers relax, a sharp pain revived him. It was like a whip falling upon a horse about to fall, or the sound of a trumpet rousing a sinking soldier. He raised himself with one supreme effort and looked before him. A slender cord had struck him in the face, and lay near his hand. Three or four unknown faces had appeared at the very garret-window from which Biroulas's accomplice had spoken to him, and confused cries reached his ears.

"He is lost!" said one person.

"Don't make any noise," replied another. "He is like those somnambulists who walk about on roofs. If you call to them they fall."

"If he only had the strength to catch hold of the rope we should merely have to pull him up."

This last remark sounded like a summons to Cambremer. With instinctive rather than rational motion he put out his hand and caught hold of the cord that lay beside him on the ledge.

The feeling which he experienced was similar to that of a sailor who touches land after a long swim. He clutched the cord with despairing energy and called out in a faltering voice: "I have it, my friends; heave a-hoy!"

The expressions he had used in his boyhood on the beach at Saint Malo returned to his mind amid his danger just as the prayers murmured beside the cradle are repeated by the aged in their dying hour. Without being very well versed in sailors' phrases the charitable rescuers understood him and began to pull with all their strength.

Cambremer had clutched the rope with both hands, but he found that his right arm would not help him to rise. His shoulder had already been so severely tried that it was now comparatively useless. However, imminent danger doubles natural strength, and his left hand made up for his right one. The first effort had an immediate result. The chevalier was brought up to a solid point of support on the water-spout, and he heaved a deep sigh of relief.

The first feeling that he experienced was a keen desire to lift up his soul to Heaven in thankfulness for the visible protection extended to him. Once on the cornice, he was saved; to reach the garret now was mere play, and he did so without any more injury than a few scratches.

Ten arms were held out to receive him, and a great cry went up from every window in the house, for they were all now filled with lookers-on.

The tenants had watched the rescue as though they had been looking on at a shipwreck.

Cambremer had not even the trouble to spring into the garret, for he was carried into it triumphantly. Before he realised where he was, he found himself in the midst of an agitated party, and did not know to whom he ought first of all to address himself. One person offered him a glass of water; another wanted to bleed him; a third congratulated him upon the courage which he had just shown. The majority talked of calling in the police, and the name of the commissary was frequently repeated.

This was like the sudden clamour of a bell which once more brought the chevalier to a sense of the situation. The recollection of the criminal plots amid which he was struggling suddenly dispelled every vestige of the physical weakness which he had experienced.

"Where is she?" said he, in a choking voice, "has she been arrested?"

"Who do you mean? Who ought to be arrested?" asked a respectable-looking doorkeeper, who stood among the people who had assisted him.

"That woman! the wretch who just killed Kaddour!"

This explanation had the effect of chilling Cambremer's listeners. It must be added that he spoke like a maniac, and that his unkempt hair and his wild eyes contributed not a little to mislead the group of listeners with regard to him. The doorkeeper tapped his forehead, which was shielded by a green shade, and a servant with a red cap who stood in the rear whispered to a neighbour: "The poor fellow is off his nut!"

"Speak! tell me, answer me!" cried the chevalier, gesticulating wildly; "did you seize that wretched creature? You must have seen her. She was here a moment ago, at this very window, and she has not had time to escape. She wore a man's clothes."

"We haven't seen any one," said one of the rescuers who had more sense than the rest, "that is except a boy of sixteen or eighteen who ran down the stairs four at a time to bring some help."

"It was she!" said Cambremer, wildly, and he darted forward so impulsively that the hands that held him were obliged to let go their hold.

"Where are you going?" cried the doorkeeper. "Take care! you'll break your neck!"

The warning was needful, for the window merely lighted the top of a staircase, and the crowd around the chevalier had hidden the nature of the place from him. He thought that he was in a room, whereas he was simply on a very narrow landing. His first steps were so reckless that he knocked his head against the opposite wall. But he was too much excited to pay any attention to so trivial an accident, and so he continued his onward rush, bawling out at the top of his voice: "Arrest her! arrest her!"

The benevolent persons who had saved his life dashed after him making as great a clattering as a cavalry charge would have made. Some of them thought that they were really following a dangerous madman; and the others were urged on by the very natural idea of keeping watch on a man who owed his life to them, and who appeared sufficiently well off to pay them handsomely for what they had done for him. Their great ardour was due to their desire to be honestly rewarded. But however fast these eager aspirants to the Monthyon prize followed the chevalier, they failed to

catch him on the stairs. Casse-Cou was out in the yard before them, and he rushed into the midst of a dense crowd, for the spectacle of his aerial exploits had drawn all the idlers on the boulevard to the spot.

In the first rank of the crowd were two policemen who received the fugitive in their arms, and at once made it their business to detain him. Cambremer looked, indeed, like a malefactor trying to escape; no matter what or where he may be, a man on a run is always an object of suspicion.

The chevalier in vain began to cry out again, demanding that the woman with the red flower should be arrested. The representatives of the law held on to him and would not let him go till they knew more about him. Meantime, the rescuers came down and began to explain themselves. Cambremer, feeling sure that he would be at once set free, struggled to free himself from the hands which firmly held him by the collar. But one of the policemen, who wore a corporal's stripes, remarked in a firm yet conciliatory tone: "You say that you are in pursuit of a woman who has been violating the law, and I don't say that you are not, but you will allow me to observe that innocent people don't make a practice of walking about roofs, and so I am obliged to take you to the station-house in order that you may explain matters."

"But she will escape ten times over!" cried the chevalier, whose brain was literally on fire.

"That is of no consequence to me," said the corporal, majestically, "I don't know this specimen of the female sex; but even if she has really broken the laws and failed in respect to the existing authorities, we shall find her, never fear. Meantime, my duty requires that I should take you along with me."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at Cambremer's feet, he could not have been more amazed. He realized the futility of striving to explain, and felt with bitter anger that his pitiless enemy was again escaping him. He stammered out a few words of explanation which made the the policemen shrug their shoulders. The corporal had been told in a whisper what the doorkeeper with the green shade thought of the case, and he nodded as if acquiescing in the opinion that Cambremer was insane.

"Come, my fine fellow," said he to the amazed chevalier, "a man has just died in the Rue Sainte Barbe. Although it may have been an accidental affair, you know very well that your testimony will be required to complete the report."

The policeman had quite made up his mind as to the chevalier's mental condition, and so he had decided to use gentle means. Cambremer, on his part, paid no attention to the fellow. He pictured little Baïa, whom he had intrusted to Paul Vernier, and he grew anxious. Now that the matter had taken such a turn, he feared that he had been imprudent in leaving the child. She now had no protector but an inexperienced youth, destitute of any great bodily strength, and she was still surrounded by invisible enemies. The chevalier realised that these foes were hovering around, and he experienced the agony of a man who feels that a mine is under his feet, and that he is utterly powerless to help himself.

He vainly scanned the crowd which filled the courtyard and saw neither the dear child nor her young protector. However he was somewhat comforted by the thought that Paul might have had the idea of taking Baïa at once to Madame Mongis'. "We must be going, my good fellow," now urged the corporal, tapping the chevalier lightly upon the shoulder.

"Very well," replied Cambremer, "where do you wish to take me?"

"Oh I over there, close by, to the station-house on the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle; it won't tire you, and you can explain your matters quietly to the superintendent."

The sagacious policeman felt more and more convinced that his prisoner ought to be removed to a lunatic asylum, and treated him with all the respect due to misfortune.

The chevalier on his side reconciled himself to his position, for he hoped that everything would appear clear to the official who would question him. However at the moment when he was about to start off with the corporal, he saw a man who was slowly coming down the main staircase of the building on the roof of which the scene had taken place, and he thought that he recognised M. Bousenna. His memory returned to him, and he suddenly recollected that the banker's offices were on the second floor of the house.

"Call that gentleman," said he to the corporal of police, "he knows me very well, and he will tell you who I am."

XIV.

IN WHICH THE CHEVALIER DISPLAYS MORE EXCITEMENT THAN PRUDENCE.

PAUL VERNIER had spent some moments in recovering from the surprise which he had experienced on meeting the Chevalier Casse-Cou in the Rue Sainte Barbe. The young man had left the bank-office delighted at the unexpected liberty granted him by M. Bousenna, and had intended to spend the remainder of the day with his friends in the Rue Férou. However on reaching the boulevard an unusual noise had attracted his attention. Proceeding to the spot whence the outcry resounded, he had fallen in with the crowd around Kaddour's body, and before he could find out what had occurred Cambremer had seized upon him and intrusted Baïa to his care. All questions were out of place at the moment when so tragical an event had but just taken place, and Paul did not stop to make inquiries. Good sense and feeling told him that Cambremer, involved in some fresh mishap, wished to place the little girl under shelter, and that the most important thing was to take her away. He did so at once; and Baïa, either because she understood the seriousness of the situation, or because she was overwhelmed by the sight which she had witnessed, offered no resistance.

A cab conveyed them both to the Rue Férou, and during the drive the child evinced no external sign of emotion. She merely choked back a few sobs; and Paul, who could not question her, wondered what was the cause of her suppressed grief.

When they reached their destination he took her in his arms, and ran quickly up the stairs. Martha Mongis opened the door. The young girl welcomed him with a cry of delight, and, taking hold of the child, she covered her with kisses. It seemed as though she tried to hide the feeling that animated her and was kissing Baïa to conceal the pleasure she felt on seeing Paul. However, as soon as she remembered herself, she drew back, blushed and said, holding the door ajar, "I am alone, Monsieur Paul; my mother has gone to church, but I think that she will soon return. Perhaps you may meet her if you walk across the Place Saint Sulpice."

It would have been difficult to express more clearly that she did not

think it proper to receive the young man while she was alone. However she had begun by taking Baïa into the room as though to serve her as a companion, in case she were obliged to admit the man she loved.

"Mademoiselle," rejoined Paul in a troubled voice, "I must speak to you at once concerning Monsieur Cambremer and other very serious matters. We have not a moment to lose."

"Come in then, come quickly, and we will save him if he is in danger!" exclaimed Martha, standing aside to allow the young man to enter. She held the child fast by the hand, and the little one clung closely to her.

"I have every reason to fear that Monsieur Cambremer is engaged in a fresh adventure as perilous as that of the vault," said Paul Vernier. "I met him by a lucky chance—a providential one—and he only just had time to confide the child to me. I must return to him, for there is everything to fear. A man has been killed—"

"A man killed?" exclaimed Mademoiselle Mongis in alarm; "but then—you will—perhaps be in danger, too?"

The most indifferent person would have understood this cry from the heart; and as those who are in love are wonderfully clear-sighted, Paul felt that there was a confession in this outburst of anxiety.

"What does it matter whether I risk my life or not, since you are going away?"

"Going away! But I—I do not know," replied Martha, lowering her eyes.

"Cassonade told me everything," said Paul; "you are going to the south for six months, perhaps for a year, and I must stay here, bound by my chain, condemned to this odious life, and obliged to obey a man whom I despise and detest."

"Monsieur Paul, pray calm yourself!" said the young girl, alarmed by his violence.

"How could you think for a moment," rejoined the young man, "that I would consent to such a separation? You know very well that it is impossible; you know very well that I love you."

This great word, so often articulated by those whose hearts forget their vows, had never before been spoken to Martha and she was not prepared to hear it. She was too thoroughly a woman not to have detected the love which she had inspired, and which she shared; but having been brought up by a careful and pious mother, she had never imagined or even suspected that such outbursts of passion could exist. All excess was repugnant to her chaste and delicate nature, and this abrupt and impassioned avowal made her shrink back as does a sensitive plant when touched by a careless hand. "Sir," said she, with calm and simple dignity, "I cannot listen to words which ought to be spoken to my mother only, and this conversation must cease at once."

"But I am quite ready to say all this to Madame Mongis, to tell her that I love you, and hope never to leave you," said Paul, stepping forward.

The conversation had been so rapid that Martha had not moved from the spot where she had received the young man on his arrival with Baïa. His ardent protestations had been made in the anteroom of which the door had remained open. Now, however, the frightened young girl was looking about her, and making ready to retreat, when her mother unexpectedly appeared. Madame Mongis, clad in black, as usual, and paler than was her wont, appeared very opportunely on the scene, for her presence

brought Paul back to reason, if not to calmness. He walked resolutely up to the widow, took both her hands in his, and said in an agitated tone, "Madame, I ask you for the hand of Mademoiselle Martha in marriage."

Madame Mongis was in reality not surprised by this outburst, for she had long known the feelings of the two young people whom Chevalier Casse-Cou had brought together. However she had various objections to make before consenting to the marriage so suddenly proposed. "It seems to me, sir," said she, in a severe tone, "that you might have chosen a better time to make this proposal, which I am not at all disposed to reply to at once."

"But later on, perhaps—" muttered Paul, in consternation.

"Be kind enough to come in, sir; I must speak with you," said the widow. "Martha, go and wait for me in the next room with Baïa," added she.

The child did not go off until she had given Madame Mongis an affectionate kiss, and the widow was glad, indeed, to have her near her again, as she had felt very anxious during her absence.

As soon as Paul Vernier found himself alone with Martha's mother, all his assurance left him, and his excitement passed away. The conversation began with various questions which the young man had to answer detailing the events of the day. When he had recounted his unexpected meeting with Cambremer, and explained why he had thought it best to bring the little girl home at once, Madame Mongis replied with the authority which her experience gave her.

"You have acted wisely, Monsieur Vernier," said she, not without showing a certain coldness of manner accentuated moreover by the use of Paul's surname, by which, as a rule, she seldom if ever addressed him. "I thank you for having first thought of placing our dear little Baïa in safety; but I am afraid that our friend, Monsieur Cambremer, is in a dangerous plight. I beg of you to go back to him now, and entreat him from me to return here at once. You must tell him that I have made up my mind, and that I wish to leave Paris on the day after to-morrow at the latest."

"On the day after to-morrow!" exclaimed Paul, in consternation.

"Yes, sir," said the widow, in a decided tone, "and it is only on our return that I shall reply to the request which you did me the honour to make to me just now. Between now and then, you will have time to reflect, and to consult a person about whom I fear you don't think of very often."

"Of whom are you speaking, madame?" asked the young man.

"Of your mother, sir, who has the right to know all your feelings as well as your actions."

Paul turned very pale, and his eyes filled with tears. "Madame," he stammered, "I will obey you, but I beg you as a favour not to forbid me your house or to take your friendship from me; I should be too unhappy if I did not see you—"

"I do not ask that sacrifice," rejoined Madame Mongis, smiling; "and to give you an opportunity of returning, I have a service to ask of you."

"What is it? Speak, I am ready."

"The banker whom you work for receives money on deposit, does he not?"

"Yes, madame; he has had a deposit from Monsieur Cambremer."

"Well, then, this is what I wish you to do for me. I have some savings

which I do not wish to take away with me. I prefer to place them in safety till my return. Be kind enough, then, to give the money to Monsieur Bousenna and take a receipt, and tell him that I shall not need the amount for some months."

"Willingly, madame," replied Paul, but not without marked hesitation. "However it would, I think, be better for you to see my employer yourself."

"No, since what has happened, I don't like to leave Baïa," replied Madame Mongis, "and I should like to have the matter settled to-morrow. You see that I am obliged to rely on you."

Paul, not being able to make any further objection, bowed in reply.

"Here are four rolls of a thousand francs each," added the widow. "Be kind enough to take them, and as you left our dear neighbour on the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, it will be easy for you to go with him to Monsieur Bousenna's office when you have found him, and then to bring him back to us."

"I will go at once, madame," said Paul, putting the gold into his pocket with a certain amount of reluctance.

He realised that the best way to get into favour was to obey Madame Mongis's orders without any further discussion, and besides he was anxious to find his protector Cambremer again. He refrained from saying that he wished to see Martha before going away, bowed respectfully, and got into the cab to return to the Rue Sainte Barbe. Little did he dream of what had occurred during his trip to Madame Mongis's.

At the moment when he was leaving the Rue Férou to repair to the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle as fast as a cab-horse could take him, Cambremer's adventure had reached its culminating point, having gone through several fresh phases since M. Bousenna had made his appearance upon the scene. The banker to whom Madame Mongis wished to confide her savings seemed predestined to be mixed up in the affairs of the little party. Chevalier Casse-Cou, who also had thought fit to place a tolerably large sum in his hands about two weeks before, now saw him, not without surprise, appear in the midst of his contention with the police, like Jupiter in a Greek tragedy.

M. Bousenna, coming quickly down the stairs leading from his office, had reached the court-yard before he knew that Cambremer's exclamations and gestures were addressed to him. He had paid no attention to the gathering near his house, and was about to pass through the crowd without condescending to look about him, when the police officer begged him to stop for a moment. The banker's handsome attire was in keeping with his respectable look, and on seeing his powerful frame swathed from head to foot in a cloak with a fur collar, the corporal felt a certain amount of admiration for him.

"Excuse me, sir, excuse me," said he, with a military salute, "but this individual has ventured to tell me that you know him and will say who he is."

"I'm not responsible for any one," growled M. Bousenna, who seemed little disposed to trouble himself about other people's affairs.

"Not even for one of your depositors?" asked the chevalier, approaching near enough to touch him.

The banker quickly drew back, set his hat firmly upon his head, buried his chin in his large neckerchief, and began to look fixedly at Cambremer, as though trying to recognise him. "I don't remember ever having seen

you before," said he, with magnificent composure, after a few seconds' examination.

On hearing this reply which they had expected, the two policemen exchanged significant glances.

"You have a short memory, Monsieur Bousenna," rejoined Cambremer, excitedly, "for less than three weeks ago I came to you here, in this very house, with my young friend, Paul Vernier, who has the honour of being your secretary. It was one morning very early, and on the evening of the same day I paid into your bank a sum of money for which I have the receipt about me. I will show it to you," added the chevalier, putting his hand into his pocket.

"There is no need of that, sir. I believe you thoroughly;" replied M. Bousenna, "but, you see, so many persons come to my office that I easily forget their faces. Be kind enough to tell me what you wish me to do?"

"I want you to say that I am a respectable man in presence of these people."

While the chevalier was speaking thus, in a loud voice, one of the police officers leant forward and whispered to M. Bousenna, some words which Cambremer did not catch. The banker thereupon nodded his head with a significant gesture, as much as to say: "Oh! that alters the case!"

In point of fact the representative of the authorities had just told him that he was talking to a lunatic, and M. Bousenna now displayed exemplary compassion for the poor madman who had asked for his assistance. "I will testify to whatever you like, my dear sir," said he, with exemplary mildness.

"Very well. Then I suppose that I can go. You will understand that I am anxious to return home, after what has occurred."

"What has occurred, in Heaven's name?" asked the banker, who suddenly seemed to take a great interest in Cambremer.

"A friend of mine has been murdered under my very eyes," exclaimed Baïa's excitable protector, "and the murderess has been allowed to escape."

"These words sound very big, indeed!" said M. Bousenna, with a singular smile.

"But I will find her; and you, sir, who live here, will help me to do so."

"I! How?"

"By going with me to the infamous den, where I followed that miserable woman. It is here, in the next street, and through your influence and acquaintance with the neighbourhood I am sure that you will be able to find out everything that I wish to know as to the inhabitants of the place."

The banker made a wry face and was about to reply by a refusal, when an individual who had slipped into the crowd interrupted the conversation. He was a man of forty, dressed like a quiet citizen in easy circumstances, but he had a hypocritical face. It was not necessary to have any great knowledge of Parisian faces to identify his mean and sneaking look with that of an agent of the secret police. He showed a card bearing some inscription well known to the corporal, who allowed himself to be drawn aside while his subordinate kept guard over the prisoner.

"This gentleman is not in the way," said the new-comer in a low tone, pointing to M. Bousenna, "for he is one of our leading financiers"—the banker acknowledged this compliment by a slight nod—"and if he will come with us and sign the report, it would be of service to us."

"That is just what the poor man asked a moment ago," said M. Bousenna, with a simple air.

"Oh! he doesn't know what is hanging over his head. He has been pointed out to the police for some time past as a madman who ought to be watched. He is quiet enough, as a general rule, but he has violent attacks from time to time. He went to-day and made a great disturbance at a house near by in company with a tall Mulatto whom he had picked up in the street, and who had the misfortune to be killed by a flower-pot falling from the third floor. This accident completely upset our man, who began to run about on the roof like a cat. As soon as the matter was reported by the detectives who took up the dead body, I was sent here with orders to conduct him to a lunatic asylum."

"That is all very well," rejoined the banker, "but I don't see what good my interference can do in the matter."

"Excuse me, sir, but if you were willing enough, you might help us very much, for there is a side to the story that has never been cleared up, and before I take this man away, I have orders to confront him with the tenants of the lodging-house in the Rue Sainte Barbe. Corporal, you must clear the courtyard. We will go in by the little door on the right which communicates with Mother Hippolyte's establishment. My men are waiting for me in a cab in the Rue Sainte Barbe, and as soon as the visit is over, we will put this man into the vehicle."

M. Bousenna appeared to hesitate for a moment; however, he ended by saying that his zeal for the public welfare had determined him to assist the authorities in this important matter. As for the corporal, he did not doubt but what he was dealing with a genuine detective sent from the prefecture, and he at once followed his instructions by pushing aside the curious crowd.

Cambremer had stood by without hearing a word of what had been said, and impatiently awaiting the finish. "Well, sir," said the banker, putting on an amiable air, "I am quite willing to do as you wish."

"Come with me, then," said Cambremer, proceeding toward the main entrance.

"No, this way, young man, this way," retorted the corporal, who stood in front of him, and then led him towards the door pointed out by the detective. "It is useless to have a fresh scene in the midst of the crowd."

"Very well," said the chevalier, "the main thing is to lose no time. But who is this gentleman?" added he, looking at the detective, who was placing himself at the head of the party.

"I have been sent here by the prefect of police," replied the man with a mysterious air.

"So much the better," said Cambremer, "we shall proceed all the faster."

It did not occur to him for an instant that the man had come from anywhere else than the Rue de Jérusalem. The detective opened a door by which the two houses communicated, and went ahead with M. Bousenna. The chevalier followed, and the two policemen closed up the rear, according to the system invariably adopted in cases of arrest. They had entered a passage which extended to the Rue Sainte Barbe. It was the one which Cambremer had followed in the opposite direction when he had first visited the old doorkeeper. They had now taken but a few steps along it when another party came in at the opposite end. At the head there was a commissary of police wearing his scarf of office; and if Chevalier Casse-Cou had caught sight of the face of his guide, he would soon have known what to think of the authenticity of his pretended mission.

This doubtful personage stopped short, as though tempted to turn round and bolt; but M. Bousenna, who was coming up behind him, urged him on and said a word or two in a low tone, which no doubt encouraged him, for he advanced towards the commissary, hat in hand, and spoke to him for a moment.

It should be mentioned that Cambremer only saw the latter part of this scene, and that he never doubted that he was dealing with a genuine representative of the law.

The commissary, on seeing the fellow's police-card, listened to his statement, and approved of what had been done. "I thought," said he, "that all this disturbance had originated with some madman or other; however, before handing him over to you, I think it will be best to make some inquiries about the accident."

He had not finished speaking when Cambremer planted himself before him, exclaiming: "Justice, sir! I ask for justice!"

"You shall have it, my dear sir, you shall have it," replied the commissary, who could hardly help laughing; "but calm yourself first of all."

"I will calm myself when I have found and convicted that horrible woman of her crimes. I speak of the doorkeeper of this hovel, who went away to warn her accomplices."

"Who is it that dares to say that I left my room?" growled the old woman, who suddenly appeared.

With the quivering flame of the fire which she had relit in order to cook her dinner lighting up her face, she looked like a witch defending the entrance of a cavern where some diabolical soup is bubbling. At sight of her, Cambremer became violently enraged. He sprang forward like a tiger, jostling the commissary aside without the slightest respect for his emblems of office, and he seized Madame Hippolyte by the throat. However, he had a powerful female to deal with; she repulsed him as though she had been a man, and gave vent to a series of shrieks, which might have been heard as far as the boulevard.

Two or three men, who accompanied the commissary, came to her aid, and tore her from Cambremer's clutches. "What is he to fly at a poor creature like that, the big, long-legged fellow?" growled the frightful hag, adjusting the filthy rags which covered her wrinkled neck.

"Come, sir," said the commissary, in a severe tone, "I have come here to make a serious investigation, and if you continue to disturb us by your violence, I shall send you where you will be made to behave yourself."

There was nothing to reply to such a threat as this, and Cambremer had self-control enough to remain silent. "Come!" resumed the commissary, speaking this time to the doorkeeper, "light us and show me the registers of your lodging-house."

"At once, sir, at once, my good sir! I should have done so already if that tall chap there hadn't turned my blood with all his talk and fuss. Would you believe that two hours ago he made a row here trying to make me tell him where a man lives whom he calls Birdoulas or Patoulard, and whom I don't know from Adam?"

"What! do you dare to say that that wretch never came here?" exclaimed the exasperated chevalier.

"Silence, sir; or I repeat that you will force me to take harsh measures," retorted the commissary.

Meantime, Madame Hippolyte, still grumbling, had lighted a candle and laid a book, soiled with wine and grease, upon the table. The official then

began to turn over the leaves. "You have but six rooms in your lodging-house, it seems?" said he.

"That's all, my good sir, and there are three which are mere closets, into which, with all respect to you, you wouldn't put a dog."

"Biroulas lodged on the first floor," interrupted the incorrigible chevalier.

"There he goes again!"

"Let me see," said the officer, "on the first floor you have Mademoiselle Mélanie Gorenflot, a dressmaker, who came here on the 5th of February, and before her—"

"The room was empty for three weeks; that did me a great deal of harm, too."

"The last lodger, it seems, is put down as having gone away on the 11th of January."

"That's not true, and this woman is telling an impudent falsehood," began Cambremer once more.

"Oh, how can anybody talk like that? Ask that gentleman there whether I have a good name in the neighbourhood or not," said the old woman, pointing to M. Bousenna, who, so far, had kept in the background.

The banker came forward, and anticipated any questioning by stating his name and calling to the commissary, who looked at him with some surprise. "I have lately had dealings with this gentleman," said M. Bousenna, pointing to Cambremer; "he asked me to assist him in his search here, and I did not wish to refuse him that satisfaction; as for this good woman, I know very little about her, though I have been living near this house for three years past; still, I have never heard anything against her."

"Very well, sir; I am always willing to listen to testimony as respectable as yours. Now," added the official, taking up the register again, "No. 2 is a man named Flambart, an inspector of the lighting of the city."

"Oh! he's a very nice man. He comes home every morning at five, and sleeps all day long."

"On the second floor Nos. 3 and 4 have been vacant since the ninth of this month."

"Oh, Lord, yes! and heaven only knows when I shall be able to let them!"

"But on the third floor you have Amanda Resuche, a fringe-maker."

"Oh! she's a first-rate workwoman, so she is, and pays cash down promptly. She works from morning till night, and only stops to water her flowers."

"And she waters them so well that the pots fall down on the heads of the people who go in and out of the house?"

"That's no fault of mine. I always say to her: 'Mademoiselle Amanda, your flower-box isn't well fastened, and one of these days there'll be an accident.'"

"So much the worse for her. I shall arrest her, and she will be fined and sent to prison. Killing a man! the deuce! it isn't such a trifling offence, let me tell you. But first of all, I must visit her rooms, in order to make out my report."

"I will take you up, sir," said the doorkeeper, eagerly.

Cambremer had listened to this dialogue with great impatience, and he had intended when the examination was over to take the magistrate aside and relate to him in detail all that had preceded his visit to the Rue Sainte

Barbe; but when he heard that the officer was about to inspect the place where the woman with the red flower had prepared and executed her bloody deed, he contained himself, resolving to explain matters at a later moment. It was on the spot where the last crime committed by the odious creature had taken place that he wished to expose all her misdeeds and those of her accomplice, Biroulas.

They went up the stairs, led by Madame Hippolyte, and when they reached the third floor, the chevalier saw with surprise that Mistigris, the cat, had again taken up his position before the door. "You see," said he, taking hold of the astonished officer's arm: "that horrible beast belongs to the doorkeeper, and never leaves the room down stairs, except to come up here. Isn't that a proof that there is an understanding between these two women?"

The commissary smiled, and looked at M. Bousenna in a peculiar way; but he did not think fit to reply to so absurd a question. His mind was evidently quite made up as to the poor chevalier's mental condition.

In the room a woman could be heard singing an old song, the words of which reminded the hearers of poor Kaddour's sad fate:

"I planted it, and ev'ry hour
I tended it, the lovely flow'r,
Oh! rose so fair,
Beyond compare
The jewel of my window bow'r."

However, this singing was speedily interrupted by Madame Hippolyte who opened the door, shouting out at the top of her voice: "Mam'zelle Amanda, here's the officer!"

The girl who bore this romantic name was tall and about twenty: but her bent figure and haggard face made her look ten years older. She rose hastily, and looked timidly at the imposing personage who was thus invading her room with so many persons in his company. Cambremer could not control his surprise at sight of the change in the occupant of the room. He assuredly did not expect to find in the fatal garret that ever-flitting being whom he had pursued over the roof, but to see a quiet workwoman in her place amazed him and seemed a miracle.

"You are aware of the misfortune which your negligence has caused, are you not?" said the official, sternly.

"Oh, don't punish me, sir!" muttered the fringe-maker, in a supplicating tone. "It wasn't my fault, and I don't at all know how the box happened to fall."

"You ought not to put anything on your window-sills; the law is against it's being done."

"That is true, sir; and I know that I did wrong; but, as regards the accident, I wasn't here when it happened."

"No matter," said the official, "and—"

"It is of great importance, on the contrary," interrupted the chevalier, who detected a revelation in the fact of the work-girl's absence, "tell us what happened, tell us at once!"

The commissary shrugged his shoulders.

"I had gone to carry some work to a person who employs me," said the girl, "it was near here, in the Rue Sainte Etienne. I was not away twenty minutes; but when I returned, I found a crowd before the door and saw a man being carried away on a litter."

"That's it!" exclaimed Cambremer, angrily; "the wretch came here

during your absence which she was watching for, no doubt. You had left the door open, hadn't you?"

"I left the key in the door."

"You hear this, gentlemen? the murderess found the door open, and the crime was easy to commit."

"Excuse me, sir," said the officer, impatiently, "you interrupt what I am doing, to talk of crimes and murderesses. It is time to explain yourself more clearly. What murderess are you talking about?"

"The woman who escaped from me, and whom I am pursuing, as well as her infamous accomplice!" exclaimed the chevalier, who had reached a great pitch of excitement. "I tell you that the woman was here just now in male attire such as she almost always wears, and that it was she who killed Kaddour. Do you wish to have a proof of the fact that she has been in this house? Well, visit the rooms on the first floor and you will there find some flowers, like those which she always wears in her buttonhole, just as outside here you found the cat belonging to that horrible hag of a door-keeper, who also is an accomplice of the scoundrel Biroulas."

As he finished this furious tirade, Cambremer made a start forward and the old woman fled on to the landing to escape another attack. The imprudent chevalier had again given way to a fit of rage that was about to cost him dear. When the commissary heard him talk of red flowers and cats, his last scruples vanished. He drew the detective into a corner of the room, and said to him in a low tone: "This man is as mad as he can be, and it is time that he should be taken to some safe place. Have you any one with you outside?"

"Two solid fellows of the same squad as myself, and a cab all ready."

"Good! I will coax this fellow to go down, so as to have no disturbance, and as soon as I can induce him to go with you, you must drive off."

"Be easy as to that, sir."

"What you have been revealing to us is very serious, sir," now said the official, turning to Cambremer, "and I must advise you to proceed at once to the Prefecture of Police to enter a formal complaint there. I will finish my investigation here in the meantime, and you can return to me if you wish it."

"Will you be answerable for this woman?" asked Cambremer, pointing to the doorkeeper.

"Fear nothing; I have my eye upon her," replied the official, evasively.

"If you go with this detective, he will take you and bring you back."

"Let us start at once, then!" cried Cambremer, rushing towards the stairs, with his appointed guide.

M. Bousenna, who had kept quiet during this scene, watched him till he disappeared, and an acute observer would have noticed on the banker's countenance strong traces of agitation which entirely escaped the notice of the commissary. "Now that this madman is on his way to Charenton," said the official, "I can draw up my report in peace, and I need not detain you any longer."

The banker thanked him politely, added a few words of commiseration with respect to his unfortunate client, and left the commissary to finish the matter with Mademoiselle Amanda.

Meanwhile Cambremer had gone down the stairs at one leap, so to speak. The ancients said that when the gods wished to destroy anyone they first maddened him, and the poor chevalier at this moment was certainly under

the influence of some evil genius. It seemed as though rage had made him blind. Under any other circumstances, he would undoubtedly have been struck by the language of the commissary, and have wondered why he was sent to the prefecture to make a declaration which it would have been much more to the purpose to make on the spot. He might, perhaps, have remarked the various asides of M. Bousenna and the detective, and the conversation carried on in a low tone with the commissary. But Cambremer's blindness was perfect, and his mind was absorbed in the one thought of punishing Biroulas.

He considered that he at last had some proof, and nothing could have removed from his mind the idea that the entire police force was disposed to help him in his search. So he made no objection whatever to following the detective, and got into the cab which was waiting at the entrance of the Rue Sainte Barbe; indeed, he went so fast that his guide could scarcely keep up with him.

The crowd whom the affair had gathered together, had now gradually scattered, and two or three obstinate gossips alone remained before the door.

Night was near at hand, for all these adventures and the trips from one place to another since Cambremer had started from the Rue Férou, had taken up the entire day, which was a short one, as is usual in February.

"Have they thought of guarding the doors of the house so that that doorkeeper can't make off again?" said the chevalier, in all simplicity to the detective who was walking beside him.

"Don't be afraid; the commissary won't let her go till we get back."

"Let us make haste, then, for we are at a long distance from the prefecture, and it will take some time to explain everything. By the bye, to whom must I make my declaration?"

"You will find one of the prefect's secretaries ready to receive it, and give the necessary directions."

They had now reached the cab, and the horses were stamping their feet with an impatience that argued well as to their speed. Never were hired steeds so restless before, and the driver, a tall fellow who sat proudly on the box, had a deal of trouble in holding them in. Cambremer's thoughts were too busy for him to notice these details, and, besides, the number conspicuously painted in white on the body of the vehicle would have removed all doubts had he entertained any.

"Get in, sir," said the detective, opening the door.

The chevalier darted headforemost into the cab, and had hardly seated himself before the detective had taken his place beside him. At the same moment the door closed with the sharp click of a spring, and the horses set off at a swift trot.

All this had been accomplished so quickly that the various operations seemed to have been effected by a mechanism arranged beforehand. They had not ridden half a minute, however, when Cambremer saw that there were two men in front of him; it was not light enough to enable him to see their faces distinctly, but he noticed their eyes shining in the dark, and he felt against his knees the pressure of the stout staves with which they were armed.

These unexpected companions might well have awakened mistrust, had not the preconceived idea of the assistance which he was sure of finding at the prefecture made Cambremer espy devoted auxiliaries everywhere.

"Do these gentlemen belong to us?" he asked, rather by way of form than to express any anxiety.

"Yes," replied the detective, curtly.

"And can I speak before them?"

"Oh, they are as quiet as the grave, and as solid as posts."

These words were spoken in a somewhat sarcastic tone; as the cab went on, the detective seemed to be less and less on his guard. Cambremer, on the contrary, under the influence of his fixed idea, was gradually working himself up to enthusiasm.

"Ah! I was right to rely on your administration for help," he exclaimed, "for the gang that I wish to exterminate have a terrible account to settle with the law."

"Bah! the authorities aren't inquisitive!"

"When they know at the prefecture," continued the chevalier, without noticing the strange tone in which the other had spoken, "what those rascals have been doing—two murders in one month or less, and that I have laid my hands at last upon their den and one of their accomplices—"

"Then you really think that that Mother Hippolyte is one of them?" asked the detective, with a simple air.

"Oh! the woman is merely a tool, but through her we shall reach her master, that Biroulas who, since he has been driven from his den near the Barrière d'Enfer, must now be in the heart of Paris."

"Ha! who knows?"

"Oh! I'm sure of it, and perhaps he has taken refuge not far from the hovel where he had already placed his victims. Ah! I want to have a serious inquiry, and I hope that the officials will closely question all the tenants of that block of houses—"

"Even the banker himself, I presume?" said the detective, suppressing a strong inclination to laugh.

"Who? Oh! that false-looking fellow who followed us, and whom I find everywhere on my path? Yes; certainly, he ought to be questioned more than anyone else. I have more than once thought that he had some secret connection with the rascals whom I am in pursuit of. But I have made up my mind to finish with him, and to-night I shall know what to think of him."

"That is a good idea, upon my word! But in your place I wouldn't be satisfied with one prisoner, I would imprison all the tenants from the garret to the cellar."

This time the detective's assistants could not suppress a faint laugh.

"Why not?" exclaimed Cambremer, carried away by his idea; "I mistrust everybody, and I sha'n't hesitate at anything in trying to find out the truth. If that man who is going along the street there was suspected by me, I would get out of this cab and arrest him."

As he spoke these words, which showed the excited state of his mind, Chevalier Casse-Cou thrust his head out of the door of the vehicle. It was going along a deserted quay, which Cambremer did not recognise.

"Where are we?" said he, quickly.

"Why, in Paris, near Pantin," replied the rascal, who was beginning to show himself in his true colours.

"But this is not the way to the Prefecture of Police?"

"Oh! All roads lead to Rome."

This insolent remark was the first warning the chevalier had of the misfortune that had happened to him.

"Where are you taking me? I wish to know!" he exclaimed, half-rising.

"Why, to Paradise, my little chap," said the sham detective.

This word was no doubt the signal agreed upon with the two scoundrels who served him as lackeys, for they immediately set to work. One of them raised two wooden shutters, which served as windows to the hack—which seemed intended especially for purposes of abduction—and this he did with lightning-like rapidity. The other clutched Cambremer's throat with a dexterity which was the result of long practice. As for the unfortunate chevalier, he had not time to utter a single cry. While these preliminaries were going on, the chief scoundrel did not remain inactive. He began by putting a gag, which he had in readiness, over his prisoner's mouth, and then, with a roll of fine cord he bound him from head to foot in less time than it would have taken an honest man to arrange his necktie. Had he been a highway-robber, he could not have set to work more dexterously.

"That's done," at last said one of his assistants, quietly.

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed the other, "it was high time to shut up his pipe. What a talker the chap is!"

"Well, now, he amused me," retorted the head of the gang; "I'll say more, he taught me a good deal, and I shouldn't have been sorry to hear him let out some more, if only to discover exactly what he knows about the old one."

"Oh, as for what he can make out of what he knows—"

"Well, he's of no account himself, for his affair will be settled to-night, but there are others who are walking about Paris who may be in our way."

"Bah! the old one'll settle them all right!"

"Yes, and meantime, guv'nor, what's to be done with this one?"

"He must be taken to the lock-up."

"To the lock-up?" repeated the first ruffian, not without a start, for everything that reminded him of the police was extremely disagreeable to him.

"The lock-up for dead dogs I mean—the bottom of the Seine."

"Oh! That's a good idea! Where shall we throw him off?"

"Why, down there, at the end of the Ile Saint-Louis; I know a place which seems as though it were expressly intended for such things."

"Near the Pont Rouge, isn't it?"

"You are right!"

"That's not half a bad place; but I say, guv'nor, it's too early to work out o' doors."

"You big idiot! Haven't we all the evening to ourselves? The old one doesn't expect us to report till midnight."

"But if we go about Paris till then we shall get our throats parched, without counting that the horses will be dead broke."

"Oh! the old one can buy some new ones; besides, don't be uneasy, Pavard, who's out there on the box, has got his orders. He'll take us to the end of the island, and drive up outside a house. He'll be taken for a respectable coachee waiting for his own people."

"And we are to be boxed up in here all the time, then?"

"No, my boys; I'm too good-natured for that. If there's one of us on hand to watch over this chap, it will be all right. We will take it in turn, and the two who are not required can wet their whistles at a little liquor-shop with which I'm well acquainted."

"That's good! long live the guv'nor!" exclaimed the two rascals in one breath.

Cambremer had not lost a word of this terrific dialogue, and he was

stifling with rage. It was not, his life that he regretted, but he thought despairingly of the dangers that threatened those whom he would leave behind him, and he cursed his own recklessness. The hack went on for ten minutes more, then slowly slackened its speed, and finally stopped.

XV.

WHICH DESCRIBES WHAT CONSEQUENCES MAY FOLLOW UPON A DECLARATION OF LOVE.

PAUL VERNIER had left Madame Mongis with a heavy heart. For the first time, he realised that there were almost insurmountable obstacles in the way of his plans ; and this discovery was all the more painful to him as Martha's mother had always been very kind to him.

At twenty, hope is high, and from the kindness shown him in the Rue Férou, Paul had somewhat recklessly concluded that his pretensions were encouraged. They were honourable, and more than once he had meant to write to his mother and tell the whole story of his love which was as warm as it was sincere ; for, with the confidence born of youth, he did not doubt but what she would give her consent. The indulgence with which he had been brought up had habituated him to rely upon his mother's acquiescence, and he very well knew that she would not weigh her dear Paul's happiness and pecuniary considerations in the same scale. One scruple, however, had held him back. To explain his connection with Madame Mongis and her daughter, he would be obliged to tell the story of the terrible night on which he had yielded to a fatal infatuation.

When Paul had received the farewell kiss of the good mother who had tended him from the cradle upwards, her last words had been : " Never gamble, my son ! "

She had pressed him in her arms, and he still seemed to feel the tears that bitter memory had brought to his mother's eyes, and which had fallen upon his cheeks. Gambling, which had brought ruin and mourning into her home, still terrified her bruised heart ; and since they had parted, the poor woman in writing to her dear son never failed to warn him against the vice which had led to her widowhood.

Paul had never had the courage to confess to her that her fears were only too well founded, and that he was already upon that dread descent which leads to dishonour and to death. How many letters had he begun which he had lacked the courage to finish ? Now that he thought himself out of danger of a relapse, his silence weighed upon him like remorse ; for the unfortunate passion which he had inherited from his father had not tampered with his natural integrity, and he had not stooped to lie. By dint of procrastination, however, he had ended by satisfying his conscience ; and he had made a vow that he would tell his mother all, when he had declared his intentions to Madame Mongis. He wished to tell her of his reformation at the same time as he told her of the love to which this reformation was due.

That day had come, but it had not put an end to his hesitation. How could he write to say that he had been met by a polite refusal, of which he guessed the cause, that cause being the very vice which Madame Vernier so greatly dreaded ? Martha loved him ; that he did not doubt

since the conversation in which the young girl had suffered her secret to escape her. Madame Mongis, moreover, could not be ignorant of feelings which mothers always guess, and she was not a woman to thwart her daughter in her affections, unless her reasons for doing so were serious.

She had only deferred her final answer because she was not confident in the young lover's thorough reformation, and she wished to find out whether he could be trusted before she gave him Martha's hand in marriage.

"She, also, thinks me capable of yielding to the failing for which I still blush," sadly said Paul to himself, as he went along the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle in the cab which he had engaged to take Baïa home. And then he thought of the journey to the south that would last six months—an eternity to a lover—and it occurred to him that Martha might forget him during her absence.

"How can I prove to her that she is mistaken?" thought he, striking his forehead despairingly; "how can I show her that I shall keep the vow which I made to Monsieur Cambremer on that dreadful night?"

It suddenly occurred to him that Madame Mongis, in trusting him with the money for M. Bousenna, had intended to put his good resolutions to the proof. The rolls of gold were in his pocket, and the sum was large enough to tempt a gamester. He had shrunk from taking charge of it; for, although his love was a strong shield against the passion of gambling, he instinctively feared the touch of gold, just as a man who dreads drinking shrinks from the sight of wine. However, he had not wished it to appear as if he were anxious to fly from a temptation which he thought himself strong enough to resist, and it must in justice be said that from the moment when Madame Mongis confided the money to him, no thought of turning it to bad account entered his mind for an instant.

The more he reflected, the more he thought that Martha's mother had wished to put him to a decisive test. He knew that she would not leave Paris till two days more had gone by. She had a whole day at her disposal during which she could have taken her funds in person to M. Bousenna, and the reason which she had given for not doing so was not good. Baïa, whom, so she pretended, she did not wish to leave alone, had Martha and the faithful Cassonade to watch over her, not to mention the chevalier himself, for although still away, he could not fail to return that evening.

Thus, everything showed that the duty she mentioned was but a pretext, to assure herself that the gambler had decidedly reformed. We easily believe what we wish, and Paul soon began to hope that this trial would be the last one, and that, if he came out of it triumphantly, Madame Mongis would change her determination and even defer her departure. "I could not desire anything better," he muttered, quite pleased at the thought of returning with the receipt which would prove that he had triumphed over the fascinations of card-playing.

Five o'clock had not yet struck, and M. Bousenna could not have left his office just at the time when there were letters to be sent off. The banker had sent Paul to carry a letter to one of the persons with whom he had some dealings, authorizing him—which was very unusual—to remain away for the rest of the day; but, after all, this was an additional reason for the banker himself to be at his office since his secretary was absent.

It is true that the young fellow, before returning to his employer, had another mission to fulfill. He did not forget his dear protector Cambremer, and he wished first of all to inquire for him in the Rue Sainte Barbe where he had left him in a crowd and near a corpse.

Paul Vernier had not even a suspicion of the cause of the tumult, but he was not without some uncasiness concerning his friend, as he knew that he was only too much inclined to plunge into the most perilous adventures. Thus it was that, in spite of his desire to be rid as soon as possible of Madame Mongis's money, he began his mission by going first to the scene of the tragical event which he had witnessed from afar. He sent away his cab and walked quickly toward Madame Hippolyte's lodging-house.

Half a dozen gossips stood before the door like carrion-crows round a spot on which a dead body has lain. Paul had no trouble in making them talk, and five or six different stories were told him of the accident which had proved fatal to an unknown man dressed like a Turk; of the arrival of the police which had followed, and made the examination of the spot by two well-dressed men; who, so the old woman said, had come there "to see what was to be seen."

On Paul giving a description of the dress and appearance of Cambremer, the women replied, all at once, that the personage in question had got into a cab with a detective who had treated him very respectfully, and had gone to make a report in person at the Prefecture of Police. Although somewhat confused, this various testimony greatly quieted Paul Vernier. Since the chevalier had gone of his own accord to the head quarters of the police, he must have discovered some of the scoundrels whom he was in pursuit of, perhaps, indeed, Biroulas himself; in fact, the journey augured well.

"We must have passed each other on the way," thought the young man; "and by this time our friend must have already quieted the anxiety of Martha and her mother."

He asked no further questions, and went lightly along the Rue Sainte Barbe till he came to the corner and entered M. Bousenna's house. His calculations proved to be correct, for he reached the office at the moment when the banker was finishing his letters. His employer spoke to him even more severely than usual.

"I told you that I did not want you this evening!" growled M. Bousenna, fixing his piercing black eyes upon his young secretary.

"That is true, sir, but I must speak to you about an urgent matter."

"If it is urgent, why have you put it off so late then?"

This double-sided argumentation disconcerted Paul completely.

"Upon my word, sir, it is no fault of mine," said he. "There was an accident in the next street, and one of my friends was mixed up with the matter—one of your depositors—Monsieur Cambremer."

"Well?" said the banker, in a tone that was almost threatening in its violence.

"He intrusted a child to me to take home to a lady who lives in the same house with him."

"You are really very obliging, sir, and good deeds are never thrown away. What did you wish to see me about?"

"Why, it is that very lady who wishes me to place four thousand francs on deposit with you," said the young man, hastily, feeling delighted to get rid of M. Bousenna's questionings. "Here is the money," he added, taking the rolls of gold from his pocket with an eagerness that showed his great desire to rid himself of a dangerous burden.

A flash was visible in the banker's eyes, but he evinced no haste to reply. "The receipts of the day are all entered," said he, after a moment's silence, "and I cannot receive anything more to-night."

"If you will allow me to deposit this money to-night, it need not be entered on the books till to-morrow," Paul ventured to say, for he did not wish to keep the gold with him all night.

"Impossible! the safe is closed. You can deposit it to-morrow, when the office opens. Did you take that account which I told you to leave with one of our depositors?"

"I beg you to excuse me, sir. I haven't had time as yet, but I will go there to-night."

M. Bousenna again fell to thinking. Any one would have supposed that he was reflecting over some vast speculation to judge by the drawn lines on his forehead, and the knitting of his eyebrows. It is to be supposed, however, that nothing very serious was on his mind, for he soon added with an indifferent air: "You must go there to-night at six o'clock. That is the only time when the gentleman is to be found at home."

"I shall not fail to do so, sir," said Paul, respectfully, making ready to start.

"At six exactly, no sooner and no later," called out M. Bousenna, while he was opening the door.

Paul went away, ill pleased with the result of his interview. He was as much dissatisfied with the order which his employer had given as he had been pleased at the result of his questions in the Rue Sainte Barbe with regard to Cambremer. He had thought with delight of taking the receipt for the four thousand francs to Madame Mongis, and of spending the remainder of the evening by the fireside in the little parlour in the Rue Férou, where the time glided by so swiftly. However, the banker, by refusing to receive the money, had upset all his plans. It was now more than five o'clock, and at six Paul must be at the house of his employer's depositor who lived near the Chaussée d'Antin. M. Bousenna's orders were precise, and the young man wished to be punctual. He had not time to go back across the Seine before attending to his errand. As for venturing to visit his lady friends, after doing that, he was not certain whether he would have the courage to make the trip when the time came.

He felt more than ever sure that Martha's mother had wished to put him to the proof, and he did not like to appear before her without giving her the banker's receipt as a pledge of his trustworthiness. It would, indeed, seem strange that a man of business should have deferred until the following day a transaction which merely required him to open his safe.

There was one way to obviate all suspicion; it was to request Madame Mongis to take the money back and keep it till the following day. But Paul, in thus ridding himself of a deposit confided to him, would be almost confessing that he did not feel confident of resisting the temptation to make a bad use of it; and he lacked the strength to overcome this false shame. To blush before Martha was what he dreaded most of all things.

"After all," said he to himself, "I need not go there to-night. Monsieur Cambremer, no doubt, has already returned by this time, and the ladies are no longer anxious. To-morrow, I will find some way of escaping from the office to take the receipt to them, and I will ask leave to return to the Rue Férou in the evening."

This plan once settled in his mind, Paul now only thought of attending to his errand as promptly as possible, for he longed to reach his room and shut himself up until the morrow with his precious rolls of gold. Although he considered himself brave, he was not really at ease; he was like a man who carries about him a deadly poison of which he wishes to rid himself at

the earliest moment. As he went along the boulevard he asked himself why M. Bousenna was so anxious that his depositor should receive his account at six, and not before or after. Expedition in business does not usually require that a person should be on time to a minute, and the depositor himself must be a perfect original to be so very particular.

The distance was not far from the Gynnase to the Rue Basse du Rempart, where this person resided, and Paul for a moment felt inclined to stop on the way and dine at the quiet restaurant where he usually ate. But he was afraid that he would be late, and so he made up his mind to go on.

The evening was fine, and there were a great many persons on the boulevards. The route which he took reminded him of the sad adventure which had led him to the gaming-table three months before. On the very side-walk along which he was now striding with his hands upon the gold in his pockets, he had first encountered that evil creature whose perfidious voice had lured him to Frascati's. He remembered, too, that she had come from that very Rue Sainte Barbe, where the tragedy of which he had seen only the bloody finish had taken place.

Although he was still ignorant of the part which the woman with the red flower had played in this new crime, the coincidence made him reflect. He turned over in his mind all the strange events in which he had been involved since that fatal meeting with her, and he thought that it might be advisable for him to leave Paris where such dark plotting seemed to surround him on every side.

The idea of going away with Madame Mongis and her daughter was certainly the chief motive of this wish to leave the capital, and he began to make all sorts of plans for the future. Then his thoughts gradually went back to the nights which had been given up to the love of play; and when he thought of his fatal passion he admitted with terror that he was not yet cured of it. The remembrance of the terrible fascinations of the card-table troubled his brain; the blood rushed to his temples, and his hands clutched the gold in his pockets. He absolutely wandered in his mind, for the treacherous metal burned his fingers, and he thought that voices were repeating in his ears the odious formulas of the croupiers.

He still walked on with his head down like a man in a dream, but weary of struggling with the phantoms that pursued him, then suddenly he raised his eyes and looked about him to drive away the dangerous hallucinations. His terror equalled his surprise when he found that he was in front of Frascati's. On making the discovery, he was seized with a superstitious fear, and began to think that a magnetic fluid emanated from the building and influenced his reason.

The temple where incense was offered up to the demon of play glittered with light, like an infernal palace. Confused bursts of music and the singing of gay songs reached Paul's ears, and from time to time with his over-excited nerves the sounds seemed like a far-off clashing of cymbals.

He stood rooted to the spot by the passion which was reawakening within him, with staring eyes and outstretched neck, and it seemed to him that the vertigo from which he was suffering urged him towards the open door. But the remembrance of Martha saved him. Her face suddenly appeared to him, and dispelled the evil dream. Then he uttered a cry, and began to run on so fast that the passers-by thought him crazy. When he stopped, the bad fancies had vanished, and calmness gradually returned to his mind.

He continued to walk on without looking back, and went quickly past the Boulevard des Italiens. As he drew nearer to the house which he was looking for, he felt that his brain was clearer, and thanked Heaven for having sent him as a preserving vision the image of the pure young girl to whom he considered himself betrothed. However, he thought with actual terror that temptation might return during the long night which he would be obliged to spend alone. He again asked himself whether it would not be best to seek refuge and safety with his good angel in the Rue Férou, but he could not make up his mind to do so. However, he resolved to take a cab as soon as his errand was done, to close his eyes if he had to pass Frascati's, and to hasten home so as to shut out all temptation. He even determined to go without his dinner in order to reach his rooms the sooner.

These reflections had brought him to the entrance of the Rue Basse du Rempart which has now almost disappeared, but which then ran along like a deep ditch on the north side of the Boulevard des Capucines. It was an ill-lighted hole, worse paved, too, than lighted, and yet, strangely enough, it had handsome houses on each side.

Paul went up to a street lamp to read the address of the letter which M. Bousenna had given him, and saw that the number was clearly written, and that the name of the depositor was M. de Taulade. He then looked at his watch, and found that it was five minutes to six. It was the right time, and he turned towards the depositor's abode.

His house was situated near the middle of the Rue Basse, and Paul, as he came to it, had barely time to draw back to avoid being run over by a carriage with two superb horses which was in all probability taking away some visitor, for it had previously been standing at the door.

The young man raised the knocker—there were no bells in Paris in those days—and knocked modestly, just as a mere bank clerk ought to do. The door opened, and he found himself in presence of a most majestic door-keeper, who eyed him from head to foot somewhat disdainfully. However, his manner changed when Paul told his errand. The doorkeeper then whistled, and a tall footman in red and black appeared.

"Take this gentleman to the small parlour," said the magnificent Cerberus.

Paul followed the footman up a staircase, gorgeously decorated with all sorts of exotic flowers, including those that the woman from Frascati's was so fond of. On the first floor a silk door-hanging hid the entrance of a boudoir, furnished with Oriental divans and adorned with a profusion of costly knick-knacks.

"The baron will come to you in a moment, sir," said the servant, going away on tiptoe.

This reception naturally surprised the young man. He knew that wealthy depositors do not usually receive the clerks who bring them their banking-account in their private apartments, and he was surprised at being treated like a friend on intimate terms. He was even tempted to believe that his visit was expected, and as six was just striking by the clock on the mantelpiece, he explained this by remembering that M. de Taulade had been represented to him as a model of punctuality.

While he was examining the costly objects which embellished the apartment, a slight noise made him turn his head. He then found himself face to face with the owner of all these precious trifles, and with a respectful bow, he handed him M. Bousenna's letter.

The baron was worth looking at, for, never did a better-tied cravat rest beneath a more delicately shaven chin. The man's face and dress were in perfect harmony, and his soft voice was in keeping with the rest. He took the paper with his finger-tips, made a show of opening it, and then paused to exclaim :

"Can I be mistaken? No—it is Paul!"

It would be difficult to describe the utter amazement which seized upon young Vernier when he heard the master of this superb house call him by his Christian name. He drew back, raised his eyes in astonishment, and remained open-mouthed before the baron, whom, on his own side, he vainly endeavoured to remember.

M. de Taulade's expression was altogether different. Resting on his left foot and with the right one thrust forward like a dancer, his hair pushed up, his eye-lids half-closed, and his lips smiling, he seemed to be overcome with delight at the sight of a cherished friend. He did not seem to think of opening the banker's letter, but devoted himself entirely to contemplating the young clerk who had brought it.

Paul tried to stammer out a question, but M. de Taulade did not give him time to do so. "Come to my arms!" he exclaimed; "come to my arms, my dear child!"

And, suiting the action to the word, he threw himself upon the young man's neck, and pressed him to his heart with the utmost tenderness.

The object of this outburst of affection had great difficulty in freeing himself from the baron's suffocating embraces, and when he did so he felt more than half stifled by the perfumes which the dainty aristocrat exhaled.

"I am quite confused and most surprised, sir," he finally managed to articulate, "for I was not aware—"

"That you were in the house of a friend, the best friend you have; I will say even more, a second father."

Paul, more and more amazed, looked at the baron in alarm. He thought that he was not in his right mind, and he made his way towards the door, intending to retreat.

But there was nothing about M. de Taulade to authorize the supposition that he was deranged. Neither his face nor his dress indicated any mental disturbance. He was a man of an uncertain age, fair, fresh, and as carefully attired as a woman. He was what is called a fine, showy-looking fellow. His curled, oiled locks rested in regular rows of wavy clusters on his cranium, two curls hanging over his low forehead, on which there was not a wrinkle to be seen. His linen was dazzlingly white, and his cuffs, which a king's chamberlain might have envied, showed off the whiteness of his hands, of which every finger bore several rings.

"Paul, my dear Paul," said the baron, in a coaxing voice, "sit down and let us talk together."

The young man then allowed himself to be led to a Turkish divan, upon which M. de Taulade seated himself beside him.

"So you do not remember me?" said the engaging gentleman, with a winning smile.

"Really, sir, I must confess that my memory is at fault, and I—"

"And so, my dear friend, you have forgotten Adrien?"

"Adrien!" repeated Paul, in utter bewilderment.

"Yes, that is my name—the name that you called me by when I used to trot you on my knees down there at La Roche."

This time Paul passed from amazement to curiosity. As M. de Taulade knew the name of the place where Madame Vernier still lived, he must be speaking seriously, and the young man was anxious to know in what way he was acquainted with his family.

"What, sir, have you been at my mother's house?"

"Been there? ten times, my dear Paul, twenty times. I was your poor father's best friend. When he stayed in Paris we never left one another; and when he was obliged to go to his estates, he always took me with him."

Martha's lover remembered only too well that his father had made frequent trips to Paris, and had brought troops of very objectionable friends with him whom he had obliged Madame Vernier to receive; however, the face of M. de Taulade was not a familiar one.

"I was so young," said he, "that I may have forgotten—"

"The pretty paper hats and the boats that I used to make for you," interrupted the baron, with a hearty laugh; "I should think so, indeed. The last time that I played with you at La Roche you were no higher than this sofa."

"But after that," said Paul, "didn't you go there again? However—"

"You were at school, my learned man, at the College de Lille, where you won all the prizes, and I never had the pleasure of being at La Roche during the holidays. That's why you don't remember your old friend; but, fortunately, he has a better memory than yours, and he recognised his dear little pet at once in this handsome young man here."

"You are very kind, sir," said Paul, bowing at the compliments and agreeable speeches which the insinuating gentleman heaped upon him.

"By-the-bye," said M. de Taulade, who, no doubt, was desirous of resuming his acquaintance with the Vernier family, "how is your old aunt, that good Madame—Madame—the deuce take it! I can't remember names?"

"I never had any aunt, sir; you must mean my cousin the Lady Superior of the Ursuline Convent at Arras, who sometimes came to see us."

"Exactly," exclaimed the baron, triumphantly; "what a worthy lady, and how she petted you! I am sure that she sends you sweetmeats every now and then."

"We had the misfortune to lose her last year," said Paul, sadly.

"Poor woman!" sighed M. de Taulade, with a look of sympathy; "and your good old nurse, how is she?"

"I never had a nurse," replied the young man, somewhat bewildered by these mistakes.

"I mean that old servant who brought you up, you know?"

The amiable baron had not been happy in his first questions, but this time he happened to hit the mark.

"Jacqueline! Oh! she is married, and I found her the other day in Paris."

"Jacqueline, that was her name!" said M. de Taulade, with emotion. "Ah! you remind me of the happiest days of my life. Why can't I talk them over now with your dear father?"

Tears came into the eyes of Paul, who had not the shadow of a doubt as to his host's truthfulness. The baron's retrospective gush had completely won him over, and he did not suspect this cunning individual of having

acted a scene very similar to the one in which Molière makes Sbrigain persuade M. de Pourceaugnac that he lived for a long time at Limoges, although he had never set foot there. However, M. de Taulade did not fail to follow up his first success.

"Now, my young man," said he, assuming a fatherly tone, "let us talk a little about yourself. What are you doing here in Paris? Amusing yourself, eh? Making a great many conquests and breaking a great many hearts?"

Paul blushed, and replied with some hesitation: "I am employed by Monsieur Bousenna, the banker, and he sent me here to bring you the account which I had the honour to hand you just now."

"Employed!" repeated the baron, without looking at the account to which the young man alluded; "impossible! you mean that you are a partner?"

"No, sir; I am employed as a secretary; I already earn twelve hundred francs a year, and I hope that my salary will soon be raised. I almost have a promise to that effect."

"Twelve hundred francs!" repeated M. de Taulade, with a look of consternation; "the son of my friend Vernier passes his whole day at a desk for a hundred francs a month! Ah! I understand!" he added, suddenly, with a burst of laughter; "your mother wishes to try you; she thinks that, at your age, a handsome fellow, as rich as you are, would be exposed to great temptations in Paris, whereas a young man who is busy from morning till night cannot run about. Charming! delicious! Women always have such ingenious ideas!"

"You are mistaken, sir;" said Paul, somewhat offended at the way in which the baron spoke about his mother; "we are poor, for my father lost almost all his fortune, and I accepted this situation because I needed it to live."

The baron's laughter grew louder and louder.

"Who told you all that, my dear Paul?" said he, with a careless air; "you poor, your father ruined! I know that there are five hundred thousand francs deposited in your name with Monsicur Bousenna. Yes, that's the amount."

Paul opened his eyes wide, and wondered whether he ought to take these utterly unexpected words as serious, or to resent them as a cruel and uncalled for joke.

"Come, come," said M. de Taulade, mirthfully, "I understand very well that you know nothing about the deposit. You are still a minor, the worthy Madame Vernier receives the money as your guardian, and she wishes that you shouldn't know of your good fortune, so that you may behave properly. I approve of her prudence, my friend; I say emphatically that I approve of it."

Paul had at first repudiated all belief in the wealth so suddenly revealed to him, but he was now less inclined to doubt the baron. "Monsieur Bousenna never said a word to me about any such deposit," he remarked, timidly.

"I suppose not, of course not! He must have received his instructions from your mother. Besides, he is an old fogey, that fellow Bousenna; an old Puritan, who thinks that a young man is lost if he does not count up figures eight or nine hours a day. Don't be afraid, my dear Paul. I'll say a few words to him on the subject, and, between ourselves, I think that that worthy Madame Vernier is a little too strict. You must be a

man, deuce take it! You must see the world and enjoy the pleasures that belong to your age—in moderation—of course—but you were never meant to spend your life at a desk.”

All this talk offered no temptation to Paul, who preferred the quiet evenings in the Rue Férou; still, the idea of the wealth that the baron talked about proved far from disagreeable, precisely for reasons connected with his love.

“Ah! if your poor father were still here, how glad he would be to take you all over this gay city which he was so fond of!” resumed M. de Taulade. “But I’ll take his place, Paul; I’ll take you about; I’ll show you how to navigate on this stormy sea! Come now,” added the baron, pressing his hand warmly, “we will begin at once. I have a few friends to dinner to-night, to whom I will introduce you—very aristocratic people, indeed, and the best company in the world.”

“Oh, sir!” stammered the young fellow, feeling greatly frightened by this unexpected proposition, “I am very grateful indeed to you, but I—I cannot—”

“Why not? Your mother did not forbid you to dine out, did she? Besides, I have you, and I mean to hold you.”

“But I have—reasons—for going home.”

“You can tell me what they are at table.”

And, dragging Paul along with his arm about him, the baron opened a door which communicated with a large room, and announced in a loud and ceremonious voice:

“Monsieur Paul Vernier, gentlemen.”

Paul was dazzled. The room into which M. de Taulade had led him so suddenly was bright with light and gilding. A good fire was burning there and around the handsome marble chimney-piece some of the baron’s friends were seated. There were but six persons present, but they offered specimens of every variety of the “fashionables” of 1830. There was the gentleman with the high cravat, large whiskers, and stiff manners assumed in imitation of Beau Brummell’s English elegance; an example of “Young France,” too, was there with a goatee on his pointed chin; and there was the modern financier of that time, with great seals hanging from his watch chain and a blue coat with brass buttons.

“The son of my most intimate friend, gentlemen,” said the baron, ushering his young guest into the circle.

M. de Taulade’s six guests bowed at one and the same moment, and then made way for the new comer. Paul’s embarrassment was blended with a certain degree of satisfaction, for the honeyed words of his host had already taken effect, and he was not a little flattered to find himself, at the outset of his social career, in such stylish company. He was somewhat embarrassed in being so plainly attired, but his host, with perfect tact, explained his not being in evening dress.

“Would you believe it, gentlemen,” said he, laughing, “that this dear fellow Paul—who, when he is of age, will have one of the finest fortunes in Artois—is now working as a clerk with that old extortioner Bousenna? Would you believe it, too, that I owe the pleasure of seeing him here in Paris to the fact that his employer sent him with an account to me?”

“Your friend looks to me as though he were better suited to receive bank-books than to carry them about,” politely remarked one of the guests, a gentleman who was chiefly remarkable for the imposing rotundity of his stomach.

"Well, I recommend my young friend to you, gentlemen, as a fine fellow;" said the baron, "and I trust that you will help me to teach him a thing or two."

"We shall not have much trouble in doing that," remarked a tall individual, whose tight coat clung to his lanky figure; "if I am not mistaken, this gentleman is the son of that dear 'De' Vernier whom the pretty women all remember so well. The proverb says that good blood always tells."

Paul felt the blood rush to his face at this singular praise bestowed upon his father before his very face, but he had not the courage to object to it. He was already going against his conscience. His first concession had at least an excuse. In complying with the baron's urgent request that he should dine with him, he had yielded to the desire to shield himself against the temptation of gambling that night.

"By remaining here," thought he, "I sha'n't be tempted to go to Frascati's, and I shall go to bed as soon as I take leave of Monsieur de Taulade."

Strengthened by this resolve, he thought himself secure, and began to feel the pleasure that a young man naturally experiences in being cordially welcomed by men older than himself.

"The dinner is ready," now announced a lackey, opening the door of the dining-room.

"Come, my dear friend!" then said the courtly baron, in his most caressing tone.

Paul could no longer resist the amiable ways of the man who had constituted himself his friend. He allowed himself to be led off, and experienced fresh surprise at the sight of a table laden with superb plate and lighted by twenty wax candles. M. Vernier's son had been brought up in the country, and placed at the bank as soon as he had left school, so that he had no idea that such luxury existed. The dinners which he had attended at Saint Omer were served in a very quiet style, and his father, whose life had been a double one, so to speak, had not introduced the elegancies of Paris into his own home.

Paul was dazzled by the baron's splendour, and, having no doubt but what his position was good, he felt proud to be received by him upon so friendly a footing. M. de Taulade insisted upon placing him on his right hand, and showed him all kinds of attentions.

The first few moments were given to satisfying the animal cravings of the party, and the conversation was at first by no means lively. Paul had time to examine the baron's friends, and, although he admired their fashionable attire, he could not help thinking that their faces were somewhat at variance with their dress. In the respectable society around Madame Vernier, certain suspicious looks, and certain contractions of the lips that disfigured these finical fine gentlemen were never seen. However, as he had the modesty to distrust his own knowledge of what was stylish, he concluded that all this belonged to fashionable Parisian ways.

Fine wines were served, and the baron took particular pains in replenishing his young neighbour's glass. At the same time he continued to talk and eat a great deal. His guests also did full credit to the dinner and the wines, but were sparing in their conversation. M. de Taulade was the chief talker, and let his tongue wag on as it chose. He was not destitute of wit, and he was especially caustic on the subject of life in Paris. His bold, free views gave Paul an insight into subjects which he had never

possessed before, and, with the help of repeated bumpers of champagne, the young man finally agreed with his host in thinking that a man is a fool to work hard to pay his way. By the time that dessert appeared, he was perfectly convinced of his own opulence, and it must also be confessed that he had momentarily forgotten Mademoiselle Mongis, although he loved her very dearly.

"This evening, gentlemen, in honour of my young friend who is not used to sitting up late, we will begin our game as soon as the coffee has been served," at last remarked the baron as the guests rose from the table, and repaired into the drawing-room.

These words, uttered in an off-hand manner, had the same effect upon Paul Vernier that a shower-bath would have had. Every honest drop of blood in his veins tingled when he heard the baron speak of cards as though he had been talking of dancing or singing.

This natural outcome of the fine dinner of which he had partaken, had not occurred to him, and the poor young fellow felt almost in the situation of a traveller who has gone up a flowery hillside, and suddenly finds a yawning precipice at his feet. But although his repugnance was so great, his embarrassment was still greater. Moreover, M. de Taulade completed his perplexity by leaning over to whisper in his ear: "Aha! my dear Paul, I am sure that the prospect of trying your luck is not an unpleasant one."

"I—I never play, sir," stammered the unfortunate young man who now felt quite alarmed.

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed the baron, with a look of utter amazement: "what stuff!"

"It is true, however," replied Paul, who had recovered some degree of self-possession.

"What! the son of my old friend Vernier, who was the best player of his time, and who made all the croupiers at Frascati's and the Club des Etrangers tremble in their boots, doesn't play! I should never have imagined such a thing. Well, well, the young men of nowadays must have fallen off a great deal."

"The remembrance which you recall, sir, would alone suffice to deter me from playing. My poor father ruined himself, and—"

"What kind of talk is that? You must be joking or reverting to your ingenuous assertions of half-an-hour since. Let me tell you, my scrupulous young friend, that your father made three hundred thousand francs in one evening at No. 154, in the Palais Royal, and that he often took home at the close of the game, as much as twenty, and even forty thousand francs. Ah! he was a bold player, and when he had a lucky vein he knew how to work it."

Had Taulade designedly prepared this treacherous speech beforehand, he could not have said anything more calculated to shake Paul's good resolutions. He shattered, with one blow, the ideas which the young fellow had entertained as to his father's losses, and, at the same time, awoke the seductive remembrance of his nights at Frascati." However, he managed to restrain himself, and replied: "I have given my word that I will never play."

The conversation had taken place in a corner of the drawing-room, and had assumed the character of an aside, for the baron's guests had discreetly moved away. However, as this last statement fell from the young fellow's lips, the Baron de Taulade decided not to keep his exhortations to himself any longer.

"Ah! that's charming; upon my word it is!" he exclaimed, bursting into a loud laugh; "and to whom did you make the promise, for pity's sake?"

Paul was on the point of indignantly mentioning his mother's name, but his host prevented him doing so.

"Mamma, I suppose?" he resumed, laughing as though he were going into fits; "that's the sequel to placing you in an office with a salary of a hundred francs a month."

Paul would have been glad to sink into the bowels of the earth, and yet he failed to reply to all this offensive joking. One weak act always leads to another. Paul had heard his mother derided without resenting it, and his cowardice cost him dear.

"Come, my dear friend," resumed M. de Taulade, "let me hear no more of this childish talk, and leave good behaviour to schoolboys who are afraid that they won't be allowed an outing on Sunday." And then he added in a low tone: "Devil take it! you surely don't mean to become a hermit; besides, between ourselves, a true gentleman never ought to be eccentric, and you would look rather ridiculous if you refused to take part in our game, which will be for very small stakes, very small indeed, let me tell you."

At the age of twenty, arguments like these cannot be resisted, and the thought that he would appear ridiculous acted upon Paul Vernier like a red flag upon a bull in a Spanish ring. Just as the animal rushes headforemost at those who have been goading him, so did the young man, touched to the quick, dart into peril.

"Well, sir," said he, trying to put on a bold air, "I should be very sorry to interfere with the pleasures of the charming evening which you have kindly invited me to spend with you, and I shall be glad to join you."

As he spoke, the poor boy looked at the guests, who were smiling at his hesitation. The fear of being laughed at by these doubtful personages made him forget his sacred vow.

"Ah, bravo!" shouted M. de Taulade, taking hold of both his hands. "I recognise my own Paul now! I knew that the son of the man who used to be the king of Parisian players would never refuse a battle with luck."

The guests gave vent to a murmur of applause, and the fat financier with the seals dangling at his fob, familiarly tapped Paul on the shoulder, and said to him with a good-natured air of authority: "Believe me, young man, there's nothing like card-playing to prepare one for the struggles of life. At your age, I already knew how to work a vein of good luck, and to keep a stiff upper lip if things went wrong. And when I went into business later on in life, I never met with my match. Life, you see, my dear boy, when you examine it carefully, is but one long game of cards; and I myself—"

"Well, what do you think of this coffee, gentlemen?" interrupted the baron, who was anxious to check the imprudent digressions of his loquacious acolyte.

"It's perfect! perfect!" replied the six guests in a breath.

"Well, we will begin as soon as you have swallowed it, if you like. We can play our little game at once, for I don't want that my young friend here should be scolded for being out after midnight."

These last words served as a fresh goad to Paul Vernier.

"My evening is at my own disposal," he said, trying to look unconcerned.

"Indeed! well, so much the better, my dear fellow, but we won't monopolise you. These gentlemen and myself merely play for pleasure, and we are not the kind of men to remain twelve hours at a game, trying to win a few louis."

The young man felt more and more at ease, and embarked upon a course of reasoning, trying to prove that he was not doing wrong in engaging in a venture at the card-table. The baron's exquisite *liqueurs* were duly tasted, and some lively banter ensued. The guests were unfeignedly gay, and the master of the house kept up the spirit of the entertainment. Paul admired his perfect ease, and was astonished by the cool indifference with which he talked of horses, carriages, money, pleasure, and everything that combines to form what is known as fashionable life.

"Do you know, my dear boy," said he to his young acquaintance, lowering his voice a little, "that there are two or three millionaires in this room, and that you need not hesitate about winning a large sum from them? If you do, I shall feel proud of you, upon my word, I shall!"

This wish, so artfully expressed, completed the subjection of the poor young fellow with whom the treacherous baron had played just as a cat plays with a mouse. It was not so much a sordid craving for gold, as a gambler's feverish desire for play that had taken possession of Paul. However, his chimera had assumed a shape, and he said to himself:

"If I win a large sum, I can return Monsieur Cambremer the ten thousand francs which he lent me, and I shall be able to leave Paris with him — with her!"

The unfortunate lad thought of following the young girl whom he loved, and forgot that if he lost he would be disgraced.

"By-the-bye," inquired M. de Taulade, "have you got any money about you?"

Paul was tempted to say "No," but false shame, which had led him on thus far, proved stronger than reason.

"Yes, I have a little," he replied.

"Oh, you won't need much," said the baron; "we play for very small stakes, but I am delighted to hear that your mother does not go so far as to leave her little Paul without a penny."

The young man could not help blushing again, but this last feeling of shame did not trouble him for long.

"Come, gentlemen," now called out M. de Taulade, "the tournament is about to begin. Who loves me follows!"

This poetic challenge was the signal for the guests to rise and proceed to the door of a little room which was specially set aside for the baron's favourite amusement. This room looked like a little sanctuary. There were thick curtains before the windows, and the shaded lamps cast a subdued light upon a round table at which some chairs covered with red morocco awaited the players.

"You must sit beside me, my dear friend," said M. de Taulade, leading Paul by the hand.

At this moment the gracious host looked not unlike a high priest dragging a victim to the altar of sacrifice.

"Let me tell you, Paul," said he, while his friends seated themselves, "that you can very well play this game without in any degree breaking your vow."

"How is that?" asked the young man, somewhat annoyed at this allusion to a past that he had already forgotten.

"Well, I'll wager that you promised not to *touch a card*?" resumed the Baron de Taulade.

"So I did."

"Well, then, you will be able to keep your word; for we only play with dice."

Paul glanced at the table, and saw that M. de Taulade meant what he said. In the middle of the table, on which there was the usual green cloth, lay a number of little cones, all upside down, and these could not be anything else than dice-boxes. The baron took up one of them which lay over half a dozen dice, and then resumed with a smile: "What do you think of this, Paul? It seems to me that it ought to set your mind at rest. You will see us play without a card. You will get out of the difficulty like that warrior of the middle ages who swore never to shed a drop of blood, and who, to keep his vow, contented himself with killing people with a club."

"I have no idea how to play in this way," said Paul, but little edified by M. de Taulade's historical reminiscences.

"Well, I will teach you," said the obliging baron, brandishing his dice-box, "and you will see how amusing it is. Fie upon those slips of painted card-board that people handle so silently! Dice, my young friend, mean life and motion. The sharp sound of the ivory in the leathern cone, the tumbling about of the little white dice on the table, the rapidity of the motion, and all that, gave quite another character to the fray."

"But what is this game called?" timidly said the neophyte, to his friend the baron.

"Crisp," my dear Paul; it was your father's favourite game, and he won many a pile by it at the Cercle des Etrangers. I will now begin to show you how it is played. Come, gentlemen, I stake five louis," said the baron, placing a well-filled purse upon the table.

"I hold the amount," replied Paul Vernier, in a voice that trembled a little.

The battle had begun, and each of the combatants had his ammunition before him. Little piles of gold glittered upon the table, and Paul was not the last to push forward some of the precious metal, the possession of which was to be determined by the dice.

He had stealthily removed a roll of gold from his pocket, and after opening it under the table, so as not to display this novel kind of purse, he laid fifty louis beside him.

"You hold my stakes, then?" asked the Baron de Taulade turning towards him.

"I do."

"Then I call seven," said the baron, throwing the die which rolled about on the table. "Two and one!" added he, as soon as the die ceased rolling; "this is a losing throw, worse luck, and my five louis are yours, my dear Paul."

The young man had not understood in the least that he had won, but he drew the gold towards him, and looked at the baron to see what he would do.

"It is your turn now," said M. de Taulade; "what will you risk for your own stake?"

"The five louis that I have won."

"They are held," called out the brass-buttoned financier, on the opposite side of the table.

"Now, gentlemen, allow me to give my young friend a little lesson in crisp. Place the two dice in your box, my dear Paul. There! that is it. Now listen to me."

There was no necessity for saying this, as the unfortunate lad was listening to his teacher's instructions with an eagerness that too clearly showed that his fatal passion held him once more under its devilish spell and would probably lead him to destruction.

"The point of 'seven,'" resumed the baron, in an impressive tone, "the easiest of all the throws with two dice, is what you must call. If you throw it at one throw, you have won; if you throw it a second time, you win again. But you must bear in mind that if you throw two, three, or twelve, you lose."

"What of the other points?" said Paul, with that quickness of comprehension peculiar to those who are naturally gamblers.

"I will explain all that presently," answered the baron. "Begin, in the meantime."

"I call seven, then," said Paul, throwing the dice with a trembling hand.

"Oho! you've thrown four, that's not a good throw," said M. de Taulade, with an air of regret.

"Then I have lost."

"Not yet; but your chances are not good ones. But now is the time to tell you the rest. You have now four, while seven has become your adversary's number. You must throw till you bring back one of these numbers. The first that comes will win. You see that it is all very simple."

Paul understood it all, and the baron had hardly ceased speaking ere the cubes of ivory were rolling upon the table.

"Four! and at the first throw!" exclaimed M. de Taulade. "This is wonderful, my dear Paul, and if you continue to have such luck as this, you will be as fortunate as your father."

"I congratulate you, sir," said the fat financier, passing his five gold coins; "the proverb is right in saying that a man always wins the first time he plays."

"The proverb says, 'Innocents reap the harvest,' and that is my case exactly," replied Paul Vernier, who had recovered all his coolness; "I had no idea what this game was, and I foolishly believed that at dice it was always the large numbers that won."

"That is only on the stage," said the baron, who seemed truly glad to see his young friend win. "And now, my good Paul, you know as much as I do, and can go on by yourself."

The pupil whom he had taught, and who had progressed so well, did not need any urging to continue. He shook the dice-box again and won twice more; however, he lost the third time. This check did not make any break into his capital, as he had only staked his winnings, and he continued playing with an ardour which caused his teacher to make an admiring remark every now and then.

"What boldness!" muttered the baron; "how well he knows how to stake his winnings, and how quickly he sees the throw! And not twenty yet! Oh, if that poor Vernier could only see him! It would really make his heart rejoice."

These praises, uttered on the sly, as it were, would have sufficed to urge

Paul onward, but he did not need them, for he was sailing rapidly along over the fierce stream of the most terrible of human passions. The game went on and grew brisker by degrees. Each person took his dice-box in turn and the throws were made with incredible rapidity, while at the same time the stakes gradually increased, till they rose to twenty-five louis each. The baron lost a great deal, but he paid with gracious promptness, and the unkindness of fate did not disturb either a curl on his head or a fold in his cravat.

The luckiest of his adversaries was the long-haired representative of Young France, the slim gambler with the goatee, who diligently piled up his winnings after each throw with an expressionless face and almost automatic motion.

The fat financier experienced alternate loss and gain, the fluctuations making him sigh like a wind-mill. As for Paul, the first throws had brought him a pile of a hundred louis, which he had had some little trouble to win. But in the state of excitement to which the playing had conducted, this sum was far too small to satisfy him. He kept saying to himself that if he could win enough to pay Francis Cambremer and go with Martha Mongis to the south of France, all would be well. The aim before him raised him in his own estimation ; and remorse, which from time to time kept pricking him, soon disappeared amid the whirlwind of mad hope.

After three-quarters of an hour's exciting play, luck seemed to turn a little. A series of unlucky throws reduced Paul's winnings, slightly at first, and then seriously. Each time he threw, chance brought back the same bad throws with painful regularity. He doubled his stakes at the first round, again at the second, and when he had doubled them twice again the man with the goatee invariably won. The latter's astounding luck would indeed have excited the suspicions of a more experienced adversary.

They had not been playing an hour, before not only had all Paul's winnings vanished, but the roll of gold which he had taken from his pocket had grown perceptibly smaller. Coolness was already deserting him, and the clearness of mind which good fortune imparts, disappeared as his confidence in his lucky star decreased.

The poor boy was becoming nervous, and passed from prudent reserve to the most reckless boldness. He risked a louis on one throw and twenty on the next. It was like the disorderly march of a routed army, and the effect of this disastrous system soon asserted itself. Two rolls of fifty louis each were successively opened and staked in the same disorderly fashion, finally joining those which had already swelled the pile amassed by the bearded automaton.

The baron took no part in this contest, but every time that a fresh defeat crushed his pupil's spirits, he did not fail to encourage and console him in an unctuous voice :

"Courage, my dear Paul ; show a little spirit, for pity's sake ! Fortune is a woman, and she must be defied. It was when luck was against him that your father showed what he was made of, and I am sure that you aspire to equal him."

Paul did not need to be spurred up in this way, however, for he was on the edge of the precipice without being able to hold on even to the remnants of the money entrusted to him. He had made up his mind to go to the bottom of the gulf, and did not even think of saving the thousand francs that now remained from the shipwreck. He cared so little that

when his turn came to throw he pushed the last roll that remained with a convulsive motion before him. "That is as it should be," whispered M. de Taulade on seeing him doing this.

The stakes were held and won at the first throw by Paul Vernier. The fat financier then laid two thousand francs against a similar sum held by Paul, and finally the stakes were again doubled. Paul threw the triumphant point of *seven*. He turned pale, and passed his hand over his eyes. The four thousand francs belonging to Madame Mongis were now won back, and this was, indeed, the moment to stop playing.

The others exchanged glances, by which the victim of this plot, had he only looked at them, might have seen that they feared that he would, after all, escape them.

"This is the lucky run," muttered the baron, as though to himself.

"I am waiting for you, gentlemen," remarked Paul, spurred on by this treacherous whisper.

On hearing this, the baron's confederates made up a pile of four thousand francs, and Paul threw the die with the rapidity of a player unwilling to take any time for reflection. A murmur arose to hail his success. He had thrown eleven, the winning number.

"Astonishing! admirable!" exclaimed M. de Taulade, "that is what I call a well-settled series. There are eight thousand francs now, and I will hold them alone. I wish to make my young friend Paul a rich man to-night."

The young man whom the wily baron was still trying to allure was at that moment struggling against his reason, which urged him to desist. He had, indeed, already put out his hand to take up his winnings when he heard his neighbour on the right say to the representative of "Young France" with the goatee: "The little fellow is afraid, and the stakes won't be held."

"I hold the full amount, gentlemen," exclaimed Paul Vernier, in a clear voice, and he threw the dice, but either through agitation or awkwardness, he threw them too hard, and one fell upon the floor. The other, which had remained on the table, marked six.

"My dear friend," said M. de Taulade, in a caressing tone, "you know the rule requires that in such a case as this the throw on the table counts, and so as to complete the point you must pick up the fallen die and throw again."

"Ah!" said Paul, in surprise.

"Oh, don't complain! your chances are superb. You don't fear the losing points of two and three now, and the second die may make you win by completing seven or eleven."

As he spoke the baron stooped and picked up the little ivory cube which he even took the pains to place in Paul's box.

Pale, and with his eyes burning with hope and excitement, the unfortunate lad convulsively shook the box which held the fiat of life or death.

"Don't let us have another six," said M. de Taulade at the moment when Paul was making the throw. "Ah! my poor friend," added the baron with a sigh of pity a moment later, "I didn't think that I should guess so truly."

In fact the two dice united made twelve, the losing crisp. Pity did not, however, prevent the baron from stretching out his hand to take up his pile of gold. As for Martha Mongis's unworthy lover, he did not utter a word.

He rose up, and walked towards the door, tottering like a drunken man.

M. de Taulade made a show of going after him, but the ruined gambler was already on the stairs, and so the baron re-seated himself, saying: "The farce is played, and if the old boy isn't satisfied, he must be very hard to please!"

Paul had gone out so hastily, that he had forgotten to take his hat in the anteroom.

It was raining, and the Rue Basse du Rempart was deserted. When the unfortunate youth set foot upon the pavement, the cold damp air struck his face and brought him to himself. He indeed needed to recover himself, for his brain was like a boiling caldron, and the most conflicting thoughts were at work there. As long as he had been seated at the gaming-table, and had been shaking the fatal dice-box which had at last brought him to ruin, he had not had time to weigh the horrors of his position. But his eyes were open now, and he could realise the depth of the abyss into which he had fallen.

A soldier, in the heat of battle, when wounded by the enemy's fire, may at first be insensible to pain; but when night comes, and the turmoil is over, nature re-asserts her rights. Thus Paul Vernier, restored to the consciousness of shame, and aware of his crime, was now enduring mental suffering more acute than the physical agony of a wounded man fallen amid the bloody slime of the battle-field.

His first thought was of suicide; and had it been possible for him to have ended his life then and there, he would have done so, so as to rid himself of the horrible thoughts that bowed him down. But in Paris it is not always easy to find death; and the Seine, that last resource of the desperate, flows along at a considerable distance from the Boulevard des Capucines. So Paul seated himself upon a stone, and crossed his arms, looking stupidly at the fatal house where he had now irretrievably left his honour.

The entrance was closed, and there was no light at the windows that faced the street. The house seemed as though tenantless. The brilliant glow, the gaiety of the evening, everything had suddenly vanished, like a will-o'-the-wisp in a graveyard. It was like what happens in those weird stories, in which a palace built by Satan is lighted up for an hour and filled with demons disguised as noblemen and lofty dames, and then at the first flush of dawn crumbles away into the darkness of hell. Paul, it should be mentioned, was just in that frame of mind when one is inclined to believe in the supernatural. Oh! if it could only have been nothing worse than a bad dream!

The silence and obscurity seemed still more mournful at a few paces from the Boulevard, where carriages full of pleasure-bound folks were rattling joyously along between long lines of lamps which poured forth floods of light.

In the midst of the remorse which weighed upon Paul Vernier, a suspicion arose in his mind, a suspicion which should have entered it before. He asked himself why the Baron de Taulade, the devoted friend, the enthusiastic admirer of his dead father, had let him go off without attempting to stop him or even console him. He had taken good care not to renew the profuse offers of service which he had made prior to that fatal game of dice; he had quietly gathered up the gold belonging to the youth whom, so he said, he had held upon his knees when a child. Now was such conduct in the slightest degree natural?

At the same time, the ruined gamester reflected as to all the events of

that dreadful evening, and the frightful truth gradually dawned upon him. A great crisis almost always prostrates the sufferer at first, but unwonted clearness of mind follows afterwards.

Paul remembered even the most trifling words spoken by his host; his unexpected welcome, his exaggerated familiarity, his mistakes when speaking of the Vernier family, and the servants at La Roche, his perfidious urging, and treacherous praise—everything returned to his mind, and he began to realise that there was some secret connection between the brilliant but mysterious M. de Taulade and the persecutors of Cambremer and Baïa.

“I will find out the truth!” he suddenly exclaimed, darting to the door of the house.

He knocked several times with such violence that all the echoes of the house were aroused. Finally the door opened, and the colossal Cerberus appeared. Paul wished to enter, but the surly servant resolutely barred the way.

“I wish to see M. de Taulade,” said the young fellow.

“The baron has just gone out,” replied the tall flunkey, with an imposing air.

“That is impossible. I have been in the street for the last ten minutes, and I have seen no one leave.”

“All the same the baron has gone out; you would have needed good eyes to see him, for he went out by the garden in the rear.”

“Did all the rest of them go the same way—the whole gang that robbed me?” cried Paul, furiously.

“Young man, you are wanting in respect to the baron’s guests,” solemnly replied the Cerberus who guarded the gate of this hell.

“Make room; let me pass!” cried the poor lad, trying to push aside the giant, whose colossal figure blocked up the doorway.

But he had to deal with a pillar of flesh and blood which all his strength could not stir. “Do you know, little chap, that you are becoming annoying?” growled this living column.

And then, before he had time to renew his attempt to get in, Paul was seized by the collar and thrown against the outer wall of the house. The door was then banged behind him, and he again found himself in the street, which seemed more lonely and mournful than before. What course could the unfortunate young fellow now adopt?

He did not even dream of again besieging the den where he had been despoiled. It was clear that orders had been given, and that the baron’s inferior confederates would oppose any fresh attempt on his part to secure admission. He might appeal to the first policeman who came by, and ask for his assistance. But it would be necessary to tell him everything, and there was no probability that upon the mere word of an unknown person of eccentric demeanour, the police would consent to search a house of such respectable appearance.

A boy of twenty, running about the street without even a hat upon his head, could not hope to inspire much confidence; and Paul, convinced of his powerlessness, made up his mind to go away. At the end of the Rue Basse he found a cab going down the Chaussée d’Antin, and he engaged it to take him home; he did not wish to traverse the whole line of the boulevards without a hat. Fortunately, he had some small change in his pocket, so that he would be able to pay the driver upon arriving at his modest abode.

M. Bousenna's clerk lodged, as was natural, in the neighbourhood of his office, having a plain little room on the fourth floor of a large house near the Porte Saint Denis. He went quickly upstairs, for he longed to be alone and contend with the thoughts that pursued him.

When he saw the peaceful lodging, to which for the last three weeks he had returned every night with his heart full of hope and love, he burst into tears. All his dreams of bliss had melted away, and he found himself face to face with the terrible reality. The image of the pure young girl he adored rose up before him, but no longer with a smile upon her face. He saw her looking pale and indignant, as if reproaching him for his shameful weakness and his now dishonoured love. To drive away this horrid vision, he began walking rapidly up and down the room, and in doing so his eyes lighted upon a portrait of his mother. It was a miniature for which Madame Vernier had sat a few days before parting from her beloved child, and the artist had painted the widow in her weeds.

Paul looked for a long time at this portrait—modestly framed with black wood and which he had hung at the foot of his bed, but he did not dare to kiss it, as was his habit every night. It seemed to him that his mother's face looked sadder than ever, and that her large eyes were full of bitter grief. She seemed to be saying to him :

"You have disgraced your name, and I curse you—you, my son, who swore to me that you would never gamble, for you have broken your oath."

Then Paul let himself fall with utter abandonment into the only chair that he had in his small room, and rested his elbows upon the table where he worked at night-time when he had not finished his daily task at the office. The thought of suicide once more returned to him, but that would mean killing his mother also ; and so he repulsed the terrible temptation that beset him.

"I will go away," he muttered ; "I will throw myself at her feet, and she will pardon me."

He then remembered that the Saint Omer coach left in the morning, and that, on the morrow, as soon as day broke, he could leave that fatal Paris which he now hated.

What did he now care for M. Bousenna and his situation as a clerk, to which he owed his terrible adventure ? However, the next day was that on which Madame Mongis would expect to see him with the banker's receipt, and the thought of that terrible receipt cast the unhappy lad back into the frightful abyss of woe. His clenched hands touched some papers which were spread out upon the table, and his eyes turned towards them. They were acknowledgments in blank which M. Bousenna had given him to fill up on the evening before : the list of the sums to be inscribed lay beside the pile, and Paul had already filled in some of the forms.

On the first, which lay on the top, he read, in large letters, the words, "Four thousand francs."

The enunciation of this sum, which represented an amount to be paid in by one of the banker's depositors, flared before the unfortunate youth's eyes like an infernal lure. To write above this tempting form the name of Madame Mongis and to imitate M. Bousenna's signature below it would be a crime. But there are times when delirium seizes hold of the brain of those upon whom vice has set her claws, and, amid the fever of the passions which convulsed him, Paul had lost all self-control.

Without being aware of what he was doing, he took up a pen and began

to fill in the empty space with the name of Madame Mongis. When he had done so, however, reason returned to him, and he pushed away the paper with horror.

"No, no ; never !" he muttered, passing his hand over his eyes as if to drive away a terrible vision.

He had risen, when there came a loud knocking at the door. This noise made him lose his head again. A visit at so unusual an hour was strange, indeed, and he imagined that M. Bousenna was about to appear before him. Accordingly his first thought was to take up the receipt and hide it in his pocket.

"Come in !" he then exclaimed, in a voice that was husky with acute emotion.

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